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Nexus, Winter 1995

Wright State University Community

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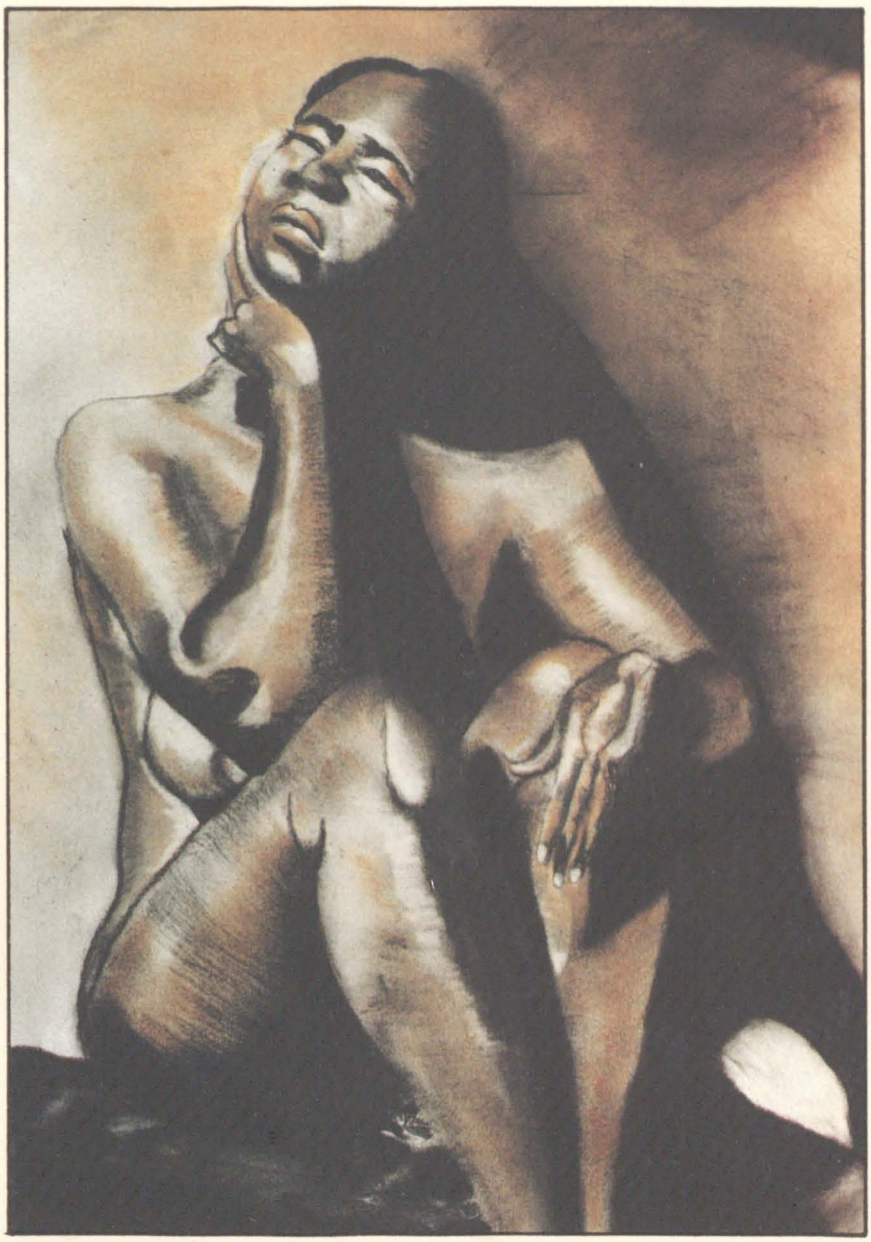
Journal of Literature & Art



nexus

Journal Of Literature & Art

Volume 30
Winter 1995

Shadows

Cornstalks pierce the snow,
their broken limbs
flailing in the wind,
flopping on the icy crust.
When the air lies down,
they wait in webbed blue shadows
like khaki-uniformed soldiers
frozen in formation.

-David Garrison

address all correspondence to: *nexus* WO16a Student Union Wright State University
Dayton, OH 45435 (513) 873-5533 $5

Contents

Fiction and Poetry

Art & Photography

Essays

Editor's note

This issue attempts to reflect a variety of tastes and preferences. I am fortunate to have a large staff who have all contributed, in some way or another, to this issue. A lot of hard work brought this issue to reality. I thank them.

I also would like to acknowledge the help and support of past editor Joseph Smith Ampleforth. He was a source of knowledge and encouragement I could not have done without.

I also gratefully acknowledge the friendship and support of Dr. Imogene Bolls, Wittenberg University; Dr. Mary Beth Pringle, Wright State University; Karyn Campbell; Jo Smith; Lee Mays; Mark Owens; Dr. James Thomas, Kevin Jensen, and my family.

Another grateful thank-you to Campus Activities and Orientation for being a $150 patron!! We appreciate your support!

Tara Miller

Tara

Editor

The Department of English

Literary Contest

for Wright State University Students
Co-sponsored by *nexus*

Two Categories
Fiction/Poetry

$100 First Prize
$25 second prize
in each category

Rules

1. Only Wright State University students may enter. *nexus* paid staff members are ineligible.

2. No more than *two short stories or five poems per person* may be submitted.

3. Submissions must be previously unpublished work.

4. Submissions must be clearly marked for the contest and must include a cover letter with your name, address, telephone number, Allyn Hall mailbox number, and a short autobiographical statement. DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THE MANUSCRIPT ITSELF. Entries must be neatly typed: short stories should be double-spaced and poems appear as they would for publication. Maximum length is 5000 words.

5. The first and second place winners will be announced and will appear in the spring/summer issue of *nexus*. All entrants will receive a complimentary copy of the issue.

6. Submissions must be received by April 7, 1995. Send submissions to *nexus* Literary Contest, W016a Student Union, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435 or leave them at the office.

7. All decisions are final.

For more information, please contact Mike Warren and/or Beth Wharton at 873-2283.

Department of Philosophy

Student Essay Contest

For Wright State University Students
Co-sponsored by *nexus*

Essay Theme:
Critical Reflections on Issues of Diversity

Three $100 prizes will be awarded and the essays will be published in *nexus*.

Rules

1. All Wright State University students are eligible (except paid staff members of *nexus*).

2. Essays may have a maximum length of 5000 words. Submissions must be legibly printed. Prize-winning essays will be requested in electronic format.

3. Prize-winning essays will appear in the spring/summer issue of *nexus*.

4. Submissions must be received by May 12, 1995. Submissions may be sent to: The Department of Philosophy, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435.

5. All decisions are final.

BUCKY LIVES!

The idea occurred to him like a masterstroke on New Year's Day, 1993. After dinner at the Diamondhead, the Polynesian restaurant in Pasadena where Webb and his wife Alice had met her parents for dinner, a shiny, three-wheeled car whizzed by them on the freeway. Alaska plates.

"Is that a Yugo?" Alice asked.

"I don't know," Webb answered.

The car had two bumper stickers. On the left—Dymaxion Power. On the right—Bucky Lives!

"Damn, a Dymaxion car," he said.

"A what?" she asked.

That's when it struck him: voluntary silence.

Webb remembered reading that Buckminster Fuller had quit speaking for two years in the late '20s in Chicago. Webb had always been fascinated with Fuller, the designer of the Dymaxion car and home, inventions that baffled the world in the '30s and '40s. Bucky had even coined the word—from dynamic, maximum, and ion. And ever since Webb's folks had taken him to the geodesic pavilion at Montreal's Expo "67, Webb had daydreamed about building a dome, a daydream that Alice had convinced him to abandon within the first year of their marriage. When he'd quit talking, Bucky had said he needed time to figure things out, to avoid killing himself, in fact. Finally, after two years, he decided he didn't belong to himself, not even for killing: he belonged to the Universe.

"You OK?" Alice asked.

Webb smiled. "Just thinking."

Even though the years of silence had put a strain on Bucky's marriage, he'd stuck with it. And Webb marveled at how he'd turned out, one of the most inventive minds of the century. A mind that saw spaceship earth from the ground—and named it that. Webb would settle for half as much insight. So, he decided on one full year. A reasonable goal.

"I'm not going to talk this year," he said to Alice at home. He grabbed a biography of Fuller from the shelf under the stereo and opened it to the chapter on Bucky's crisis of faith in the '20's.

He handed it to her. "Not till 1994."

Alice cocked her head. "Did mother say something to get your goat today?" Webb grabbed a little pad of yellow paper with adhesive strips from the coffee table. They were handy for lists and reminders.

But I will write notes for the important stuff, he wrote next to a happy-face emblem.

Sometimes, when Alice left for work early, Webb would wake up to find a little yellow happy-face list stuck to the back of his hand.

"Are you out of your mind? You've got to be kidding, Webb," she said, not allowing time for him to answer, even if he wanted to. Which he didn't. That wasn't important stuff.

Alice read a few pages in the Fuller biography.

"Who in the hell do you think you are Webb?"

Webb didn't answer.

"Buckminster Fuller was an outright genius—not to mention a damned kook. You're neither buster. Besides he had wealthy friends—can't you read between the lines? The only wealthy friends you have are my parents." Alice tossed the book in the

magazine rack at the end of the sofa.

"And what will the dealership think of you not talking? Get real, Webb."

Webb tried to compose a quick answer to fit on the pad.

"I said, just who in the h-e-double-l do you think you are?"

After less than one day of silence, Webb had no answer for that one.

Webb was a parts man in Pasadena. A parts man at a Chevy dealership, with a degree in Business Admin., General Emphasis. But with a secret, undeclared and unrequited minor in Philosophy—only three classes actually, to fulfill a Humanities requirement. But even now, twelve years later, the memory of those classes and the feeling of luxuriant irrelevance they revived in Webb helped him through many afternoons, alone at his terminal, deep within the nested menus of inventory-control software. A parts man at a chevy dealership, same job for five years, working mostly in front of a VDT, but also supervising the counter help and compiling reports—mildly indispensable, because of his knowledge of inventory categories and ordering systems. "Mildly indispensable within certain definite limits," as his boss Jim Swain had laughingly put it at last year's employee evaluation meeting.

Webb couldn't tell for sure if anyone at work noticed when he didn't speak after the New Year's holiday. His co-workers read his notes with an unsurprised air of acceptance that made it seem as if they'd always been expecting the silence, or some similar stunt, from Webb. And Webb's biweekly paychecks kept appearing like perfectly regular and equal acts of invisible grace—deposited every two weeks in the account at California National—and then sloughing slowly away in check after check like little bits and pieces of dried-up time.

But one Tuesday afternoon late in April, Webb had to leave work with a terrible crick in his back when it dawned on him all at once that what he was selling to the Chevy

dealership day by day, pay period by pay period, was his life, all he would ever have of it. He jerked upright violently, almost falling out of his chair, the base of his spine on fire.

As he inched out of the office, afraid to turn his head either direction, Jim Swain gave him two Flexiril muscle relaxants from a bottle in his own desk.

"You need a prescription, Webb? My doctor's good about that. You'll be in tomorrow, eh? It's your anniversary date. Six big-uns, Webb. We'll run through your yearly evaluation together. I think we may have us a little problem this year, buddy."

Webb nodded. A sharp twinge shot down the back of both his legs.

Alice wasn't nearly as understanding toward Webb as Anne Fuller had been toward Bucky. On April First, three weeks before Jim Swain reminded Webb of his upcoming evaluation, she handed him a note at the dinner table after a silent meal of hamburger helper and macaroni.

If you can't beat 'em, join 'em, she wrote on a little sheet with Garfield the cat in the corner.

Does that mean what I hope it does? Webb answered on the last of his smiley-face pads. Truce?

I've been talking with my father Webb. Alice worked at her father's life insurance agency in Santa Monica.

There's only nine months left. Smiley-face.

Look, there's no point in my opposing your little quirk any longer. I've done some research of my own, Webb. Garfield.

On Bucky? Webb was hopeful. The last three months he'd finally taken control of his life—even if it was in a quiet way.

Right. On Bucky and his long-suffering wife Anne. Have you invented anything startling so far this year? Alice cramped her writing around the grinning-cat logo.

The year's young. I do have an idea about windshield wipers.

Windshield wipers?

Webb tired of the conversation, his longest in months. And the wiper idea wasn't clear enough to share yet, just a few preliminary sketches with the graphics on the computer at work.

I've got a little agreement I want you to sign, Webb.

Webb wanted to believe Alice was going to join him in his silence.

How long are you going to try it for?

Three months. And if there's no change by then, permanently.

Webb thought that might be going to far. Permanent silence?

The doorbell rang four times in a row. Webb noticed the WestClock on the wall said seven, straight up and down.

Who would that be? Webb wrote.

My father. And the movers. Happy April Fools, Webb.

Alice went to the door. Webb shuffled the little pile of notes on the table while three men in green uniforms loaded the furniture. Alice's father sat in the front room and smoked. Before the movers took the dining table, Webb signed the separation agreement Alice gave him. On the second page, a two column list divided the household property. Alice's list was much longer than Webb's, but Webb had always prided himself on not being a materialist. Alice's father notarized the agreement. His notary sealer bulged in the pocket of his sport coat like a pistol.

Webb sat under a palm tree in the backyard until he saw the moving truck leave. The rent was paid for another month. He would miss Alice. But not too much. He had the notes of what might be their last conversation in his hand.

He went back inside. He thought he'd stick the notes on the refrigerator, but it was gone. The large igloo cooler from the garage sat in its place. Webb walked around the nearly empty house, fascinated with all the indentations the furniture had left in the carpet. Neat little squashed spots, flat circles and squares in the shag.

Webb skipped the evaluation with Swain. The pain in his back convinced him he didn't have any more of his life to sell to the dealership. The phone rang less every day. The last day of April, Webb mailed in his resignation letter. And another rent check.

On May Day, at home alone, lying on the living room floor with a heating pad at the small of his back and his legs elevated on the wooden chair Alice had left, Webb invented his first word: "epiphasight." A neat combo from insight and epiphany—which was exactly how his idea had come to him, all at once, from above and below, within and without, the kind of vision that he was sure only silence cultivated.

For weeks Webb had felt himself collapsing inside, floating down in an empty silo as tall as a skyscraper, a bottomless vat lined with the fluffy, pillow-shaped spaces where the sounds of words used to be. And in this silent space, Webb sensed that his words inside never went too far without a little hitch, a blank spot, a looking away, a dead-end. Conversation, Webb realized, was a way of pretending to go forward with words, in spite of the dead-ends, a swinging back and forth that circumvented the constant cul-de-sacs. But it never went too far in one direction without pulling up short, afraid of sailing off the edge of a flat world. That's why stories were so seductive—any kind—soaps, mysteries, thrillers, sitcoms—they supported the illusion that language really went somewhere, a kind of highway you could get on and ride—back and forth across the lines, clicking to the regular sound of asphalt seams, racing from one page to the next, from a beginning to an end.

But inside the quiet circles and loops of one lone head, it never worked that way, and Webb suspected that everyone knew it, but couldn't, or wouldn't, admit it. In silence, you could begin to make out all the places where the highway disappeared into thin air.

Webb boiled it all down: Silence wasn't golden, that was for damn sure. Silence was taboo.

The severance check he got at the end of May pleased Webb. He paid a month's rent and gave notice on the house. He was getting ready for a trip although he wasn't sure where to. But Webb knew that ideas like destinations didn't loom as large in the silent world as they did if you gave voice to them. He bought a fat packet of fifty-dollar traveler's checks.

The phone never rang anymore. For several days someone malicious had let it ring early in the morning. Webb tried taking it off the hook, but as soon as he'd replace it, it would ring again. Finally he answered, and without listening for a voice, he eased the receiver into the garbage disposal while he ran cold water. When the receiver was half way in, the disposal froze up and the phone made one feeble little ringing sound.

He considered going to see Alice several times. She left him her new address, in a huge apartment complex in Hawthorne, but even if he got past the security guards with his notepad, what could he write to Alice that she would understand? Would she care about the catalogs on dome construction he'd sent for? His patent application for solar-powered windshield wipers? No—they were in different worlds now.

On June 30th, a county court agent delivered Webb a divorce subpoena, set for August 14, with or without Webb. Webb knew it would be without.

July 1 was a kind of holy day—the tenth anniversary of Bucky's death, and the halfway mark in Webb's year of silence. It was also moving day.

Webb had pared his belongings and packed them in his Luv pickup the day before. He still didn't know where he was headed, but he had a strong hunch where to go for inspiration.

He took the Santa Monica Freeway toward the hospital where Bucky died in 1983.

After six months of silence, Webb believed, as Bucky had, that everything meshed in an orderly, meaningful, but nonverbal network in which nothing was truly separate—not the dead, not the invisible, not the past.

Bucky always illustrated the idea with his vision of "reverse breakfast." He'd ask audiences to close their eyes and imagine a camera filming the whole world and then to concentrate on the film of themselves eating breakfast. Then he'd ask them to play the film backward, to watch their bodies turn inside out, the cereal, fruit, eggs and bacon being unchewed and returning to the plate, then the pan, the package and further, back to the field, the orchard, the hen and the hog. Everything's connected, and separate selves are only make-believe morsels that float in the broth, chunks in the same soup of time.

Q.E.D. Bucky wasn't really dead. At least not all of him. Webb figured the hospital where the tangible part of Bucky had disappeared ten years before was a likely place to connect up with the other part of him.

In the east parking lot at the hospital, Webb ran into a small crowd. He quickly parked the Luv and walked closer. A few motorhomes were parked in a blocked-off section of the lot, and people milled around a speaker who read from Fuller's book Nine Chains to the Moon. Webb recognized the unmistakable cadence of Bucky's long noun-strings, his interminable sentences. And his invented words. Synergy. Dymaxion. Tensegrity.

Several people sat in folding chairs under awnings that extended from their motorhomes. Some wore Bucky T-shirts. A small man with a long gray braid motioned Webb to an empty chair next to him. Webb sat down. For a long time the man said nothing. He fingered his braid. Webb wondered if he was voluntarily silent, too, some kind of wiseman who traveled from one Bucky festival to another.

Finally the man spoke. "Did you know Bucky was only five-foot-two?"

Webb shook his head.

About noon the commemoration ended and the group broke up. Webb walked back toward the Luv, but it was gone. He'd left the keys in it. For a moment he felt furious, then foolish. But he let his vision rise until he felt he could see all the people in Los Angeles County, so many without cars, so many homeless, so many without ideas, so many hopeless. So his truck had been stolen—big deal. The silent world was as rich as ever. He patted his pocket for his traveler's checks, his wallet, his notepad.

The man with the braid stopped his Freebird motorhome at the edge of the parking lot. He offered Webb a lift. He said he was headed to Thousand Oaks.

When they passed the sign for the I-5 interchange, not far from where he'd first seen the Dymaxion car on New Year's Day, Webb had his inspiration. He scribbled on his pad and handed it to the man.

Stop. Let me out.

"What? What's the deal? You deaf and dumb?"

No. Just let me out here please—I'm heading north.

"I'll take you to the Sentegado exit."

No. Right here.

The man pulled onto the shoulder. "Hell of a place to stop, buddy—it's your funeral.

Traffic's insane here. Say, are you all with us, pal?"

Yes, I'm fine. Thanks for your help. Bucky Lives!" Webb wrote.

The man stuck the note on the dash and gave Webb a thumbs-up sign. Webb realized that Bucky was merely a hobby with the man, a weekend diversion.

"I don't know where you're headed, but you may be out here a while. You got any gear?" A semi roared by. The Freebird swayed.

Webb shook his head.

The man went in the back for a minute.

"Here, take this. I don't need it." He handed Webb an old canvas suitcase. He put a blanket, a canteen, and an opened bag of chips in it and zipped it up. He also gave Webb a half-full mesh bag of grapefruit and a worn copy of Bucky's book Intuition, one of Webb's favorites.

Webb shook the man's hand. He took the suitcase and grapefruit and book and got out.

"I'm Al Warney," the man said, leaning over through the passenger window. "I live in Bougainvillea Motorhome Park in Thousand Oaks. Stop by. What's your name, anyway?"

Webb shrugged to show he didn't have a free hand to write with.

"Well, whatever—good luck. You'll need it."

The Freebird disappeared into the stream of traffic. Webb opened the suitcase and drank from the canteen. He jammed the grapefruit and Intuition into the suitcase and walked slowly toward the northbound interchange, thinking.

Who he was wasn't as important as what he would do. And what he would do was find that Dymaxion car again. Damn if he wouldn't. It or something like it. He would go to Alaska, the big clean place he'd only heard about—he take this highway as far as it went.

He turned and planted his feet. Traffic wailed by, a slap of dirty air at his ears. Webb smiled into it. There was no reason to hurry, not even past pain or ugliness, he had plenty of time—that thick wet illusion that glued everyone together. Webb sensed it stretching and gushing around him, a sticky invisible afterbirth holding him snug into the place and the moment, thickest perhaps between his shoes and the pavement, but staining and soaking deep into everything else, too. He held his hand out and squeezed it, a damp gauze between his fingers, and when he blinked, he felt the warm moisture of it beneath his eyelids.

He took out his pad and wrote "Thanks for stopping—I'm headed for Alaska" on sheet after sheet, until he had about fifteen ready.

He felt it then—confidence—a form of reality as solid as physics, or despair, or tax-deferred annuities, structured by its own integrity, and deep inside him it was rising steadily on the swelling tide of his own imagination.

Imagintegrity. A word Bucky would be proud of.

The blare of a horn dopplered by him, then a jeering voice on the wind. Webb ignored both. He smiled again. His arm floated up until his palm was almost even with his shoulder. He folded his fingers back into his palm and let his thumb drift out into the bright and noisy marrow of the world.

Michael Kent **Dayton '95**

the juxtaposition of sighs

we exhale in unison
not yawns exactly
for neither of us is tired
but defeated
it's six thirty
we've run out of things to say
the television is an obsidian mirror
in which i examine
minuscule heads and
minuscule hands
which deathgrip teacups
what a show we make
i see us
mid season replacements
on the cover of tv guide
pure boredom
this show is the very best
that television has to offer
i chuckle
you place your teacup
on the wooden platter
as if to ask for a share
of my amusement
i laugh
then you turn to the television

and say i wonder if
there is anything good on
i laugh like a small child
you shake your head
oblivious king
of one-liners
who channel surfs
and sighs

resurrection 2
(poem for my approaching
26th birthday)

i have spent a quarter
century tilling barren wilderness
now my garden blooms ambrosia
and pomegranates
the seeds
i share with my sisters

immortal
we tumble among
post apocalypse roaches
abandon the madonna and the eve
to create a self from ourselves
our sanguine imaginations flow like blood
as we remove our father's nails
and with these ruddy plumes
compose a half remembered history

Honest Work

My blood pressure was up again. At my last checkup the doc was on me about that, and my weight.

"Are you getting any exercise?" he wanted to know.

"Some," I lied. I haven't played racquetball for four years. Can't remember the last time I rode a bike or ran.

He also gave me his speech about stress, about not taking things too seriously, about smelling the flowers, and so on. I wanted to ask him what I should do about my quarterly sales quotas while I'm smelling all these flowers.

Anyway, to get him off my back, I got serious. Lost five pounds, pretty much held to three or four cups of coffee a day, except for the week I was in San Francisco for the sales meeting. When the weather got better, I walked the three miles to work. The day I met Longfellow I was walking. That day was by far the most exertion I'd had for a while.

I never saw him before that day, but from a distance he was a picture from my high school literature book—flowing white beard, long wavy white hair. From the neck up he was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. We approached each other at dusk across the parking lot of Brightwood mall, the only two people on foot in that empty section of the parking area.

He was forty, at most, not only broader and heavier but several inches taller than me. He was wearing washed-out brown work fatigues. His hair and beard had grown together into a dingy grey shrub, tinted with yellow tobacco stains.

As we got closer he put up a hand, asked if I could give him a push. I said I was sorry, I didn't have my car. He acted almost offended. "Not with your car," he said. "Last time anybody pushed me with their car it scratched the hell out of my paint job." He seemed to be sizing me up, seeing if I was fit for the task.

Back then I wore running shoes, left a pair of regular shoes at work and changed when I got there in the morning. A blue nylon knapsack on my back held some work for later at home. Otherwise I was dressed for the office.

He grinned at my running shoes. "Anyway," he said, "you look like you need the exercise."

Frankly, I didn't appreciate the guy's attitude, but in sales you learn to handle all types. I smiled back. "Okay," I said, being friendly. "You're going to put me to work."

"Nobody needs to tell me what work is," he said, turning to lead the way. "I never knew anybody that died of honest work."

That gratuitous little speech caught me by surprise, but I figured he was stressed out about the car. I kept my mouth shut and followed, a step behind. His arms and hands were huge, the seat of his pants stained with grease.

As we started across the lot I saw his car stopped in the traffic lane near the entrance, only fifty yards from the Sears Garage. I wondered what this repair bill would set him back. I imagined him paying it off at ten dollars a month, 18 percent interest.

Every six months when I took my leased car for service I paid with the company credit card. I ordered a new car every two years. Except for an occasional bug in the electronics or the air conditioning, it never needed repairs.

Longfellow pointed to a phone booth at the side entrance of Food Fair. "You got any change? I need to call my old lady." He held out a hand but offered nothing to be changed. I found a couple of quarters in my pocket and gave them to him.

He veered off toward the phone booth. I stayed in the center of the parking lot while he phoned. The walking put a tingle of circulation in my ankles and feet. After only two weeks of that, I already felt better. Maybe I could get somebody at work to play some racquetball again.

Longfellow filled the narrow booth, holding the phone to his ear with his left hand, gesturing with his right. Soon he hung up, but remained in the booth. He turned away from the open door to light a cigarette, then put the second quarter in the phone, made another call. He was talking and gesturing again.

I saw I wouldn't be home by six to catch the news. But I remembered about smelling the flowers. Forget the news, I thought. Relax.

A man leaving the store held his overcoat collar shut against the wind. I realized my wool suit coat didn't do much to keep me warm.

Longfellow finished his calls and stepped out again. He motioned to me across two rows of cars to follow him.

As I caught up to him, he seemed preoccupied with the phone calls.

"Everything under control?" I asked, just making small talk.

"You *bet* it's under control," he said. "I see *to it* things are under control!" It was as if I had accused him of something. He kept walking, looked straight

ahead, more like talking to himself than to me. "Enough craziness in the world as it is," he went on, "without letting your own affairs get out of control." It didn't make any sense, but I started feeling responsible, like I had caused his car trouble, like I was responsible for the craziness in the world.

Longfellow's car sat in the traffic lane entering the shopping center. Two cars crept tentatively around the disabled car, the drivers looking at it sideways as they passed.

It was an ancient Oldsmobile: 1970, '72 at the latest. The kind of car they made back when gas was 29 cents a gallon. The ads for that model talked about cruising on a luxury liner. The original paint was either grey or faded blue. The right front fender was replaced but not repainted. It was maroon. Rust-retardant paint—a shade lighter than the maroon fender—spotted the bottom of the right passenger door.

The front bumper carried two expired security stickers from Lackland Air Force Base. A large red-on-white bumper sticker announced: *GOD IS MY COPILOT*. Another: *FANTASY LAND - HORSE CAVE.*

In the back was a small boy, about four. The kid stood looking over the seat. His eyes followed his father. He'd been eating from a family-size bag of potato chips open on the front seat. Crumbs of potato chips ringed his mouth. One side of his face was smeared. It looked like he'd wiped crumbs off with his hand. When he saw his father returning he took another potato chip.

Longfellow went around to the driver's side and put his right arm through the window, taking hold of the steering wheel. The keys were still in the ignition. He took a last drag from his cigarette and flipped it away. He braced his left hand on the window frame, ready to push.

I realized it was a while since I'd pushed a car. I wanted to hold up my

end of the bargain, was glad for the extra walking I'd been doing. I took my position on the passenger side, glanced at the Sears store. A folding door opened into a repair bay with stacks of tires all around.

"Straight for that side entrance?" I asked.

"No. To the gas station," Longfellow answered. He straightened up, looked at me over the top of the car. "Why would I want to go to Sears Roebuck?"

"That station is serve yourself, gas only," I said. "They can't do repairs." I got gas there all the time, passing my credit card to a teenage clerk inside the booth.

Longfellow seemed impatient to get started. "I don't need any service," he replied. "I'm out of gas."

The gas station was 300 yards away, the first half sloping downhill to a storm drain, the rest uphill. Walking back and forth the last two weeks I noticed the incline. Even for the two of us, pushing the car up that hill would be an effort. But Longfellow was matter of fact about it, like maybe *I* was slow to catch on. I asked if he couldn't just buy a gallon of gas and carry it to the car.

"I'm not about to give anybody $1.49 for a plastic can to carry a dollar and 15 cents worth of gas in." It sounded like he'd had a run-in with the kid in the station. "He wouldn't just let me use one," he said. "You've got to buy them."

I was having a hard time convincing myself I should push that monster 300 yards, half of it uphill, to save $1.49. I tried to persuade Longfellow the plastic container was a good buy. "It's probably not a bad thing to have in your trunk," I offered weakly. I even started to offer to buy it myself. "I've got the buck fifty," I said.

But Longfellow wouldn't hear of it. "I'm not looking for a handout," he said. He gestured with both hands in mock helplessness. "Look, if you don't think you can handle this, then okay. If you're so busy you can't take a minute to help me and my kid, fine."

Relax, I said to myself. The first principle of sales: The customer is always right. I decided to shut up and get it over with. "Okay," I said, bracing my hands against the window frame, ready to push. "It was just a suggestion."

Despite its size, the car started rolling easily. Partly because it was downhill. Mostly, I thought, because of the adrenalin I released into the first push. Actually, the effort felt good. Nice to see I could still cut it. I lifted some weights in college. Maybe after raquetball I could work out on one of those new weight machines.

Longfellow steered around potholes. He skirted the drain in the center of the lot, missing a stack of twigs, a Styrofoam cup, a battered carton left by the melted snow.

Even when I felt the increased strain of the uphill side of the lot, I knew we had enough momentum to make it. I was calculating the remaining distance to the gas station when I heard the right rear door open behind me. I looked around. The boy sat on the edge of the back seat, holding the door open, leaning over to watch the pavement move slowly by beneath the car.

I stopped to slam the door. The car stopped rolling, and Longfellow was quick to react. "I wish you'd told me you were going to stop in the middle of the hill."

By now I realized this guy wasn't out to win the good will award, but I couldn't let that one go by. "I wish you'd told me he was going to open the door!" I shot back.

He almost laughed in my face. "Three miles an hour?" he said. "What were you afraid would happen?"

Calm down, I told myself. "Look. I'm sorry," I said. "A moving car. The door open. It's just not my idea of safe. It's your kid I'm looking out for."

Longfellow barked at the boy. "Ethan, leave those potato chips alone until supper." He braced his hands on the frame. "Are you gonna push, or tell me how to raise my kid?"

I was out of breath, out of patience, but there was *no way* I would let this bastard get to me. I thought of Berger, the purchasing agent at Aetna, back in 1982. He made Longfellow look like a pussycat. And I sold Aetna a $75,000 computer system. I managed to keep my mouth shut, turned back to pushing.

There was still sand from the winter's snow treatment in that section of the parking lot. My feet slipped as I tried to start up again.

"You'd think those expensive sneakers would hold up better than that," said Longfellow. He was on solid ground on his side, although he couldn't move the car up the incline by himself.

"I'm in sand over here," I said.

"Don't tell me about sand," said Longfellow. He straightened up and wiped the back of his hand across his beard. "You know, I put up the parking garage down by Commercial Wharf. Now *that* was sand. You ever try using a front-loader in sand to move around two-ton sections of steel?"

Even in this chilly wind I felt sweat on my forehead from the effort. My shirt was clammy against my shoulders from the knapsack straps.

By pawing like a horse, I scraped clear a space of pavement to stand on without slipping.

My left arm and shoulder were stiff. I flexed them and braced again for

the push.

The car wouldn't move. I grunted with the effort. I heard nothing from Longfellow. How hard was he pushing? I wondered. Was he pushing at all? I braced again, put all my strength into it. It felt as if all the blood in my body went to the top of my skull. It was the first time I remembered feeling the very instant a headache started.

Finally it felt like I was slowly bending the frame of the car. I knew we were moving up the incline. The gas station was clear, except for a car about to pull into the inside row of pumps.

I called out, "Steer for the outside pumps."

The only reply came from the kid. He took a plastic M-16 off the floor of the car and fired at me through the window. "Bam bam bam! Bam bam bam!"

The huge Oldsmobile reached the concrete apron of the gas station, glided under the mercury vapor lamps just as they went on. I struggled the car to a stop before it passed the pumps. The clerk in the toll booth was finishing a sandwich. My legs were unsteady and out of control. I held onto the frame of the car, waiting for the ground to feel solid under me.

Longfellow looked at the clerk, then at me. I half expected he'd ask me to pay for the gas. Instead, he lit another cigarette, looked at the clock. "I didn't think it would take any 25 minutes just to get this car pushed into the gas station."

I wasn't feeling that great: dizzy, nauseous. I almost asked the clerk to call a cab. Instead I decided to rest a minute. Catch my breath. Took off the knapsack and dropped it. Sat down right there, on the curb.

The boy leaned out the window. Pointed his gun at my shoes. "Bam bam bam! Bam bam bam!" he said.

The last I remember, he turned his gun toward my chest, and opened fire.

I came to when they lifted me. I was breathing from a mask over my face. Take it easy, someone told me. Relax. It's okay. As they fastened me in, I heard Longfellow outside. "I never saw him before in my life," he said. "He came out of nowhere, like to scared the Bejesus out of my kid." I could imagine him, gesturing with his cigarette. "You have to watch yourself out in these malls," he said. "Nowadays, you never know who you might run into."

Jumper

"There's more than one way to do it, you know," said Elizabeth.

She gestured with her drink toward the bridge, and I shrugged at the obviousness of her comment. Of course there were any number of ways to end a life, and on a cold, rainy Saturday like this, you might think the man clinging to the railing would have preferred a dryer method of exit. Standing beside Elizabeth at the glass doors to her balcony, I focused the binoculars for a clearer view of the jumper. He wore what appeared to be a gray sweat suit, and splayed against the equally gray bridge under a slate-colored sky, he had disappeared momentarily like a lizard camouflaged on a leaf.

"Just once I'd like to hear what the police are saying," I said. "Do you suppose it's anything original?"

"I doubt it. Toss another log on the fire, Anne."

Elizabeth gestured toward the fireplace, an angry red mouth in the otherwise unlit room. It was four o'clock, and already the November afternoon was merging into twilight. But neither of us felt any desire to turn on the lights and brighten the apartment; it would have destroyed the mood cast by the weather and the scene outside. No, this was really ideal: lounging in Elizabeth's stylish living room, a spread of cheeses and paté on the coffee table, bar cabinet close at hand, and an unobstructed view of the bridge through the sliding glass door to the balcony. No need to put up with the push and pull of the crowd below.

I went to the fireplace and added more wood. Then I took a seat on the

sofa, one eye still on the bridge. There had been little activity in the past fifteen minutes: the jumper seemed frozen in place, the police calmly trying to talk him down. Two squad cars blocked the lanes, and the traffic waited in stalled lines, drivers and passengers gathering to gawk. Elizabeth gazed on the scene, not saying anything. Not cooperating, I thought to myself.

"Well, I can't think why you let Edna give the speech at the honors assembly yesterday," I said, changing the subject to force her to speak. "There were parents in the audience, after all."

Elizabeth downed her drink. "Exactly. Let them see what I have to put up with."

"But it gives a bad impression of the school."

"And of the teachers—which wouldn't happen if you didn't have a contract protecting the incompetent." Elizabeth sneered. "Maybe after yesterday's performance, the parents will go to the School Committee and demand the old coot be removed."

She thrust her empty glass toward me, and I silently fixed her another drink. Her sniping at the contract rankled, though privately I and every other teacher agreed Edna Cooper was a growing embarrassment. In a simple opening speech she'd lost her place twice, mispronounced faculty names, and given the entire audience a glaring glimpse of encroaching senility.

"At least the smart parents know enough to put their kids in the other fourth-grade class, so all Edna gets is the dorks." Elizabeth took her drink back to the balcony door and gestured impatiently toward the bridge. "Jump, you twerp."

I refilled my wine glass and spread a cracker with foie gras. Elizabeth always had the best: caviar, Camembert, imported English crackers. She wasn't

eating much this afternoon. I shrugged and helped myself.

"All right, let's talk about someone else. Rita? Helene? Bert?" I ran through the roster of teachers and staff—not that the predictable doings of our little school provided much to dissect. Though there had been the time a student teacher was caught in an affair with the poet-in-residence Elizabeth had obtained through a grant. The young man had fancied himself a romantic in blouson shirts and tangled hair; his odes left the children scratching their heads. But to the impressionable student teacher he'd been Lord Byron reborn. "Silly girl," Elizabeth had scoffed, signing the letters of complaint against them. "If anyone had a right to him, it was me."

She pointed now to the bridge. "Look, they've brought someone. Give me the binoculars."

I hurried to join her. Down on the bridge, the police ushered forward a woman in a red raincoat. She held a black umbrella, and as the wind blew it back I saw a white face and long brown hair. She gave an impression of being pretty, but it was too far away to tell. The gray form clutching the railing lifted its head at her approach.

"Wife? Girlfriend? Sister?" I peered, impatient for my turn with the binoculars. Elizabeth's apartment building gave a sweeping view of the bay, and in summer we could scan the water and observe the people in the marina on the point. The bridge was just to the north, a busy four-lane span, and in the three years I'd known Elizabeth we'd witnessed half a dozen would-be jumpers, two of whom had actually dived in. The first time she'd summoned me to her apartment, I'd felt honored. "Come on over," she'd said on the phone, "there's something interesting going on." When I arrived and learned what she found amusing, I felt sick. But I didn't leave, and by the third or fourth jumper, it had begun to

seem ordinary and almost comic, like a silent movie watched from afar. In any case, there was nothing we could do to alter the outcome. Some jumpers we missed; they took advantage of the 200-foot plunge during school hours or after dark, and we had to be content with the media reports. Most, of course, let themselves be talked down. "They'll be back," Elizabeth would say.

"Well?" I demanded. She handed me the binoculars, and I adjusted them to my eyes. The woman in the red raincoat was holding one hand toward the man, talking obviously, but not yet resorting to dramatic pleas. Perhaps the cops had coached her to go easy. Her face remained indistinct, her hair and the umbrella whipping this way and that, and I remembered how gusty it could be on the bridge as the wind funneled up the bay from the ocean. Not a pleasant day at all, and by now the people in the backed-up cars must be steaming. By chance, I'd arrived at Elizabeth's only minutes before the commotion began, and while I wanted to prolong the event as much as possible, on the other hand I hoped our man would leap before it grew too dark to see.

As if echoing my thoughts, Elizabeth spoke. "Jump, you fool! You're already soaking wet."

Her voice had an edge I'd not heard before, and I noticed her glass was empty again. Drinking a little much, aren't we? I thought to myself. On the bridge the woman was beckoning gently, but the man had gone flat against the railing once more, this time in limp indecision. I offered Elizabeth the binoculars. If I kept her appeased, she'd be more likely to do what I wanted later.

"Did you make up your mind about Sam's retirement dinner?" I asked, thinking that might be the cause of her bad temper.

"Yes. I'm going with Hal."

"What??" For a moment I forgot all about the scene on the bridge.

"Elizabeth, what are you thinking of? Sam's been superintendent for over twenty years. He's on boards all over the city. The mayor, the council will be there. And photographers..." My voice trailed off as I tried to assimilate the news. Elizabeth's choices had been whether to go alone or to be conspicuously absent from another important function, an option she'd been exercising increasingly of late. But to flaunt her married lover—I stopped, surprised at my own sense of scandal. Elizabeth studied the jumper, ignoring my shock.

"You can't do that," I said. "You talk about Edna getting fired, but what do you think will happen if you're seen in public with Hal? There's bound to be someone at that dinner who knows him or his wife. What are you going to introduce him as—a friend?"

Elizabeth shrugged.

"Surely Hal hasn't agreed to this?"

"He doesn't think anyone will spot us. His business is on the other side of the state."

"But he's well known, Elizabeth. Rumors will fly. Think how it sounds: an elementary school principal having an affair with a married CEO."

Elizabeth shrugged again, and I felt a maddening rise of frustration. What the hell was the matter with her? This wasn't the way our afternoon was supposed to go. We were supposed to please ourselves with food and wine, talk about life, pity the poor fools below. Then, if I maneuvered her properly, she'd let me take her to bed. Hal didn't even belong in our conversations, damn him, and what right had she to jeopardize our relationship by opening herself to scrutiny? We should go to the dinner together—I'd said so from the start—perfectly natural for two women, colleagues, to choose the safety of car pooling to a late night winter event. For that matter we could round up any of the other faculty whose

spouses were unavailable and arrive en masse. But to bring Hal...

"You're trying to force the issue," I said, "make him leave his wife. Do you really think she'll let him go?"

"We'll see." Elizabeth handed me her glass. "Fix me another drink."

I spared a quick glance to the bridge where the drama remained at a standstill, then went to the bar cabinet to splash ice, whisky, soda into the glass. Elizabeth raised the binoculars.

"Who cares what they think?" she said. "It's bound to be another stupid, stuffy affair. Want to take bets?"

"On what? Sam's retirement dinner?"

"On the jumper. I say he doesn't have the guts to do it. It's been what—forty -five minutes now."

She checked her watch, then accepted her drink as I came to her side. Her jaw was set, eyes cool, face hard and taunting. She wore a lavender sweater and gray slacks, expensive like all her clothes, and her dark hair shaded with silver had the precise style of a salon ad. Subtly, not overtly, I'd learned to copy, molding myself for success. What benefit Elizabeth derived from our relationship, I wasn't sure. Once, when I asked her why she'd never married, she'd countered with "Why did you?", but at least my ten years of marriage and subsequent divorce diverted curiosity about my single state. As for Elizabeth, the conclusion in the teachers' lounge was that her highness didn't think any man good enough. Or any woman either, I could have told them.

"All right, I say he will." I nodded toward the jumper and helped myself to the binoculars. The woman in the red raincoat seemed agitated now, her gestures more urgent. She looked to be in her mid-twenties, and suddenly my mind began to spin their story: she'd rejected him, he was desolate, now she'd have to com-

promise herself to coax him down. She'd have to promise him a second chance and emotions that had already died. And even if it worked to save him this cold rainy day, Elizabeth was right: he'd be back.

"Don't go with Hal," I said. "At the very least, it will ruin your career."

"What career? Don't tell me you consider this the pinnacle of success?"

"But you could move up. You might have had Sam's job if you'd applied for it."

"I don't want it. They're all dead ends."

I mulled her words. Not news exactly—she'd complained along these lines before—and half of me agreed that to wind up with twenty years as superintendent and a black-tie retirement dinner was less than a crowning achievement. But the other half of me disagreed. Damn it, I liked my job, I felt good about teaching little dorks to read and write, and I kept the valentines they gave me and returned their hugs when we said goodbye at the end of the year. And if Elizabeth didn't value her position as principal, there were plenty of others willing to take her place. Including me. I stopped at the thought, then let it grow. Why not? I was qualified, dedicated, popular with the parents. As principal, I could set the tone for the whole school. I gazed at Elizabeth, beginning to count my advantages: eight years younger, more energy perhaps, a better compromiser, still in touch with the rank-and-file. If I had the position, I certainly wouldn't endanger it by a foolish affair.

"Look." Elizabeth motioned, and I jerked my attention back to the scene.

On the bridge, the woman was still pleading, but two of the cops had moved into the crowd. They seemed to be leaving, then they split, one right, one left, working in a semi-circle back toward the railing. Their dark uniforms eased through the press of spectators in the deepening grayness of twilight and rain.

Slowly, they began to close on the jumper.

"They must think it's time to act," I said.

Elizabeth's eyes narrowed. "All it will take is one little slip, and gravity is on his side."

For another minute we watched spellbound. The jumper's head was turned toward the water, and he appeared not to see the cops approach. The woman in the red raincoat ceased her pleas; her arms fell to her sides as she awaited the outcome of the maneuver. Yes, do it, I urged, as the man gazed down at the lapping sea. You've held us all hostage to your despair. Now give us a thrill. Take the plunge. My pulse quickened in anticipation. Never before had conditions been so favorable, the position of the jumper, his lover, the crowd, so optimum for our view. Jump, you fool!

"He's going to do it," Elizabeth said with satisfaction, and I turned my head toward her in sudden intuition. She'd scorn anything she could have too easily. Once Hal was free, she wouldn't want him. And it might surprise her to learn that he wouldn't want her either. But if she was intent on jumping...I pressed my lips together.

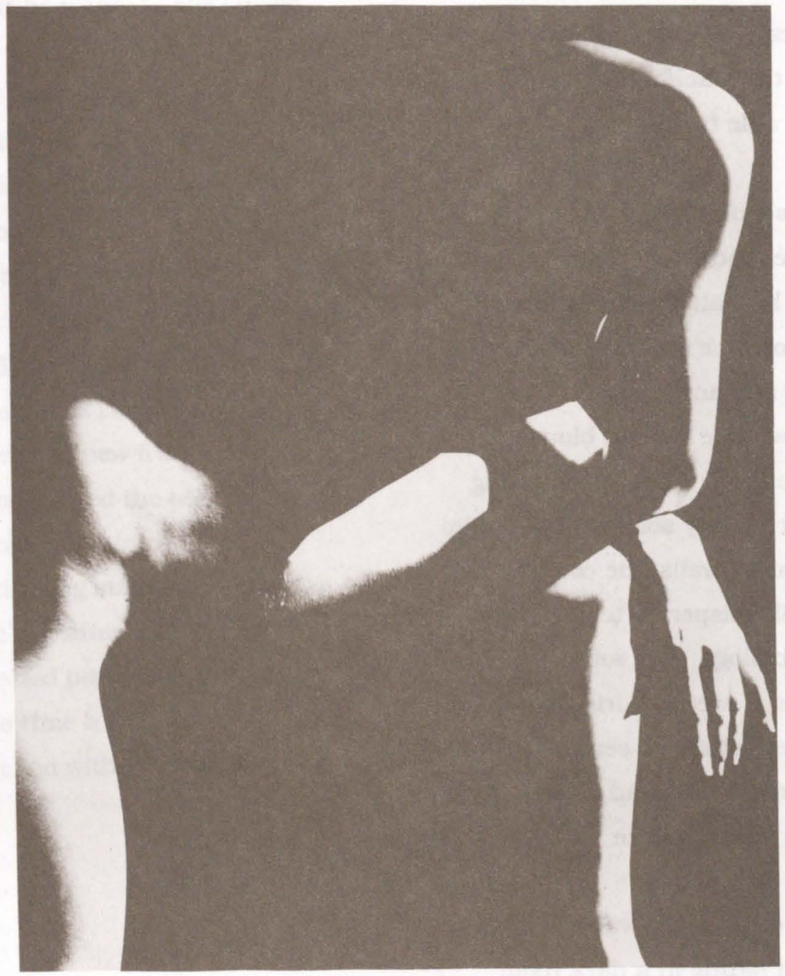
"All right, go with Hal then." I feigned an injured shrug. Let her think I cared. Once the scene outside ended I'd be leaving, and I wouldn't be back.

On the bridge, the police were closing on their quarry. The man on the railing was almost invisible in the rain. Then suddenly a gray form launched itself, spread eagled against the empty sky. In silent agony it tumbled over and over, falling awkwardly toward the waiting sea.

Just A Thought On The Voice Of Our Generation

Kurt Cobain blew his head off in the basement of his home. What does this mean to me? It means that Nirvana won't be making any more albums. What does it mean to every trendy little high-schooler in the country? It means that the "voice of our generation" abandoned them and they should all act depressed.

Not that I didn't like (respect is a more suitable word) Kurt. He was brilliant in a simple sort of way. I'm just not into that whole "Kurt understands us—he's there for us" garbage. Besides—why does my generation have to have a spokesperson? Why can't we speak for ourselves? Maybe some of my generation aren't capable of speaking for themselves. Who knows? I suppose we all have our Idols.



Thomas Tebalt **Abstract II**

Iris

she was so stacked he
was afraid to look at her
afraid he might get called
to the blackboard and not
be able to stand up

Iris looked so warm
she made him shiver
as he waited after lunch
above the second floor steps
for a chance to look
down her low-cut blouse
she knew what was showing
her flowery softness swept him
against walls he could not sit
still whispering to her
in biology her voice
was a sweater Iris the rainbow
knew what her senior boyfriend
wanted she had walked in on
her parents once

he dreamed of walking in on her
just sitting in a dark room
and then no dream
she was wearing a tight
black cashmere
the day they got stuck alone

in an elevator downtown
he felt the sap rising
felt the weight of dreams
aching in his chest and arms
she knew she knew she knew
what he wanted she smiled

and hugged him
twenty-five years later
at their class reunion Iris
who climbed poles
for the phone company
worked oil rigs in Alaska
built her own home this time
he sat still and listened
when his new friend Iris
remembered the pain
of blooming into curves
and being stared at when
she explained how breasts
pushed people away from her
this time his chest
swelled with her feelings

Scenes from a Midwestern Road Movie

Others view our lives in black and white. Not movie black and white, but television black and white. The ancient kind with the tiny screen and the rolling picture and the little speck of light that remains for what seems like hours. But, unlike the pictures on the screen, we are not real to them. They come in and look, but they don't, or won't feel. The movies make them cry, make them laugh, affect their lives; we hold their interest between shows in the Big Top; then they forget us. They don't think we're real. The World's Smallest Giant. How can that be real? I hear them ask each other all the time. It can't be real. Not to them, anyways. If it was real, then they would have to realize that I am just a midget in a cage. They couldn't deal with that. Inhumane. Unjust. They would take up my cause then. Of course, on the outside they were the ones who laughed and pointed, and left me no alternative but this cage. I could have had a nice job with my psychology degree, if only they could have taken advice from such a little man. But they would never stoop to that.

I often wonder what their lives are like out there. They never wonder what ours are like. You never hear them say, "Do you think that hurt when she got all those tattoos?" or "How does he eat without any limbs?" or even, "I wonder how she is in bed, being triple jointed and all." We're just not real to them. I know this because I used to be one of them; then I grew up. Rather, I didn't grow up,

and now I'm in here.

I joined the act at the age of twenty. No one would hire someone as small as me or love someone this short. I needed the work and the acceptance. I assumed it would only be temporary, but love's kind of hard to forsake once you've found it. My parents could not love me, but Sharie the Rubber Lady could; boy, could she love me. After a while, I could not love her backwards, but, luckily, I found Nanna the Human Tattoo. She's a work of art; she even has sculptured nails. She's really given me what I need. Women notwithstanding, it did not take me long to find out that I had found my place in life. I was no longer extraordinary or strange; in fact, among the likes as the Siamese Triplets, Walter the Seal Boy, and Albert the Pierced man, I was hardly worth noting.

My early days with the show were wonderful. In those days I experienced none of the disillusionment that plagued me in my later years. Well, except for the time they told me that the Invisible Man was a hoax. I was shocked! We had gotten drunk together, for Christ's sake! It didn't take me long to get over that, though. Aside from that one incident, those early days were the sunshine of my youth, my cotton candy before an eternity of discarded hot dog buns.

The human soul can only endure a certain amount of anything before finally caving in on itself. Not only life's griefs, but its pleasures as well. I knew one character, Cristoff the Sublime. He was involved with Sharie for nearly two years. One can only handle the Rubber Lady in small doses; however, Cristoff was a hedonist, he indulged himself in her decadent arena one too many times. At least he passed happily. Unfortunately, my soul's burden was of a less carnal nature.

People look at us; that's the whole point of the show. Day in, day out, swarms of people, neverending lines, with only one purpose: to look at us. It

didn't take long to get used to the constant staring. I had been stared at my entire life; only now I got paid for it. After a while, you even give up the act. Sure, at first it was fun to pose and try to make people believe I was actually a tiny giant, but then I realized the fact that is the downfall of so many in this business: they just don't care. I once asked Eric the Living Fossil if it had always been so. He claimed that, in his youth, people cared. Women would actually cry at the sight of the Inverted Boy, and faint in the presence of the Squid-Faced Man. Nowadays, it's hard to tell if they even see beyond the rim of their glasses. Albert once told me about how, during one of his shows, he intentionally pierced an artery and cried out in agony. As he writhed on the stage, fiddling the long needle in and out of his flesh in a pool of his own blood, the crowd gave a disinterested round of applause, threw a few coins on the stage, and left for the cotton candy vendors. It was this kind of apathy which finally took a toll on me.

My mother fawned over me in my early years. Ever since, I have needed the spotlight, to be the center of attention. After the passing of thousands of blind crowds, I decided that I could no longer be an unnoticed speck in the corner of some child's eye. Many of the others felt the same way. We were unique; we deserved notice. We just didn't know how to achieve it. It was Charlie the Crying Clown who became our savior. Although he was a clown, Charlie spent most of his time in our part of the camp. He was a truly pitiful sight, and honestly dampened the spirits of all of the happier clowns. None of us seemed to mind; he was a decent soul. As it so happened, Charlie was with us the day we began talking about our desire for fame and notoriety, and he could easily sympathize. Being an unhappy clown was Charlie's life; he played the part better than any clown who ever lived. He played it so well, he became a naturally unhappy man. Unfortunately for Charlie, nobody cares for an unhappy clown. Adults ignored

him and children ran from him. The other clowns thought this made him bitter and self-destructive; if that was true, I never saw it. Because of this attitude, Charlie liked our idea of seizing some well-deserved attention for ourselves. He told us a story of a couple of elderly gardeners who went on a country-wide rampage knocking over convenience stores and filling their gas tank without paying for the gas. According to Charlie, the couple became world-famous. Legends sprung up around the pair. Mothers would often warn their children about the dangers of ending up like them: shot down in their prime by a young soda jerk. He could not remember their names, but he was sure we could if he would have said them. We fell in love with Charlie's schemes for a similar rampage and undertook our furious planning in earnest.

While all were enthusiastic at first, only Albert, Charlie, and I had the balls to pull this off. Sharie offered her own special brand of help in the gaining of a car and one of the security boy's guns, but after that, she just sat on the sidelines and watched, puffing away on one of those terribly long cigarettes she loved to suck. Charlie's plan involved us piling into the car, driving until we reached a convenience store, and then murdering the owner and taking all the cash, soda, and fruit pies we could carry. We hadn't thought much farther than that, but we figured it would come to us as we went. We waited until Monday afternoon, the Sideshow Folk's weekend, when most folks are too busy to come out and see us, or the drivers are too hung over to carry us to another town. After breakfast, we followed Sharie out to the temporary gravel parking lot the town always prepared for our visits. The first grasshoppers of the young summer followed us in a hoard, creating a gleeful parade through the tall stretch of grass behind the stables which led to the brown, pebbly lot. It was the only untrammeled patch of ground in the whole area, so full of unseen life it made us all itch. We were finally born

into the dead lot, whose sole occupant was a faded blue Nova. Wow, I thought on first sight, a convertible! Only on closer inspection did I see that the roof had merely been torn off. We never asked Sharie where she found it, and, thinking back, I'd guess that's probably for the best. She told us that the gun was in the glove box, handed Albert the keys, wished us good luck and jiggled back toward camp.

Our eyes slowly turned from her receding, undulating matter to that of the keys, and who was going to drive. Neither Albert nor I had ever driven a car, and Charlie's giggling enthusiasm eliminated him from the competition. It was finally decided that I was the best choice, owing to my stint with the clowns as the last one to emerge from the tiny yellow car. We peeled out onto the open road, the wind running its ethereal fingers through our hair. Albert, who had brought with him his little bag of tricks, began piercing his skin with everything from needles and nails, to files and fishing lures; it was his idea of a disguise. Charlie sat in the back seat grunting with his eyes clamped shut and that familiar, constipated grin on his face which I have always assumed to mean he is thinking.

As I drove on, I got great pleasure from watching the clown in the rear view mirror, mainly because I could not see anything else above the steering wheel. Suddenly his teary face sprung to life and he shouted "pull in here!" It was Bobo's Mini-Mart. Bobo had been a clown on our circuit for over thirty years. He was the original Crying Clown and Charlie's mentor. When he retired, Bobo could not stand to be apart of the circus, so he bought himself a tiny yellow store just a mile from his most beloved stop from his working years. When Bobo witnessed our arrival, his chubby hand waved a chubby wave, and his chubby face smiled a chubby smile. He was glad to see us, and had been expecting us. We always pay a visit on our first Monday in town.

I reached into the glove box and pulled out the tiny, four-shot .22 revolver. From the looks on Albert's and Charlie's faces, I could see that I had been elected trigger man. I shoved the little gun in the back of my jeans and under my Hawaiian shirt, (the floral one, not the one with the parrots). We put on our serious faces and marched into the little store.

"Boys! How are you?!" Bobo always yelled for the first twenty minutes. He passed out hugs to everyone except Albert, who, by this time, was a virtual pin-cushion. He pinched my cheek and told me I was looking a bit shorter than last time, then told Charlie he looked so good he almost wanted to cry. Over 86-ounce Drenchers (complete with souvenir cup) of ice tea and a bag of Double-Stuff Oreos we discussed old times and recent gossip. After an exquisite microwaved lunch, I whipped out the minuscule revolver.

"All right. Enough with the small talk. We're here to rob you, Bobo." His round face chuckled in disbelief; even after we explained our plan he just gave a fatherly shake of his head and wondered if we might stay for supper this time. I was unable to get our point across, so I shot him in the belly. Before that, I never realized how much a belly that size could bleed. I thought Bobo had yelled when we first arrived; that was the whisper of a moth's wings in comparison.

"Oh, Christ," Albert said. "What do we do now?"

I looked at Charlie. He was grinning again, and of no use to us. I shrugged my shoulders amid a confused frown. "I guess we wait for the cops. Demand ransom or something."

Bobo was rolling on the floor, shrieking and crying that he would have given us anything we asked for. His agonized eyes pleaded "Why? Why?" Albert and I both agreed that this was rather distracting, so we dragged him into the back room and shut him in. We went back out front to wait for the cops and the

media, and walked straight to the fruit pies and soda. Charlie heard the rip of the crisp wax paper, stopped his thinking, and joined us. After an hour we ran out of fruit pies.

"What now?" I could hardly think with so much sugar and artificial fruit flavor in my system. Luckily, Charlie interjected.

"Cards, anyone?" It was difficult to concentrate on euchre over the commotion in the back room. The wails had subsided to moans but were still an annoyance. We decided to check on our friend. The blood had puddled out under the door, and Albert nearly hurt himself when he slipped on it. The huge mass heaved with every breath. His massive arms splashed across the gore in an effort to grasp our feet for help. Charlie kicked him over onto his back so we could see his face. His cheeks were drained, and his forehead was clammy. His skin matched the color of Charlie's make-up, while the blood from his nose and mouth ran down around his chin in a gory frown. Albert dipped a finger into the floor and splashed tears of red down Bobo's cheeks to complete the picture.

"Please, boys. I'm dying." With that, Bobo erupted into fresh shrieks and convulsions, none of which helped stop the flow of blood.

"Isn't there anything else we can do for him?" asked Albert. At a loss for medical training, I plugged Bobo three more times in the belly. That also did nothing to stem the scarlet tide from within Bobo which lapped at our feet, but it was the best I could think of under the circumstances. At least it stopped the shrieks; the moans were much more tolerable.

With the noise reduced we were able to play a few decent hands of three-man euchre before our game was rudely interrupted by a customer. He was a filthy rich man from out of state, who, as he said, was "just passing through." He appeared to live and die by that phrase; it was his all-purpose answer. "What do

you think of this weather," I asked him, trying to be neighborly as Albert filled his car with Twinkies and gas. He held his hands up and shook his head once. "Just passing through." I told him about the show, and that he should try to catch it sometime. "Just passing through." It was the only opinion I could extract from the man. I finally told him about Bobo. I showed him the gun and kicked the old clown once or twice to give the man one of his screams. I told the man to turn us in, call the cops, call the media, call the national guard. He wiped the sweat from the rolls of fat on his forehead and loosened his World's Greatest Grandpa tie. "Just passing through." As he flowed through the automated front door, he paused and finally added, "but I'll see what I can do."

A cloud of dust followed the man back toward the highway. He had forgotten to pay, but I didn't care. The word was out. We were finally getting somewhere. I checked the gun, but it was empty. Albert and I searched the Nova while Charlie knocked over the racks of groceries to fortify the plate-glass store-front. Under the backseat, Albert found an empty pair of security guard pants with three shells in one of the back pockets. I reloaded, and we waited.

Our appetites arrived before the police. Gummi bears and aerosol cheese may not be that nutritious, but we were planning on a blazing end in a matter of minutes and were set on going out smiling.

Some time after dinner, we came to the realization that the police were never going to arrive. We couldn't leave Bobo to die alone in the back room of his mini-mart, so we set up some crates as a makeshift table and chairs and got a friendly card game going to keep him company. We tried to include Bobo several times, but he just kept sliding to the floor, splattering blood on our pants. After Albert's well-played loner, Bobo's breathing became more labored. This wheezing was even more of a nuisance than the screams. To the benefit of all concerned,

Charlie turned the clown over onto his stomach. Bobo began blowing blood-bubbles. At first they were numerous and musical, but they eventually died to an occasional hum.

A giddy feeling of relief washed over us when Bobo's life finally ended. Charlie said some words over him and placed a plastic flower on his chest; then we grabbed a soda for the road and marched back to the Nova. We drove back in silence with the awareness of failed greatness, each pondering what was to now become of us. Halfway back to the camp, I pulled off into a field where we left the car and the gun and the soda to rot with our potential. The entire grounds were empty when we returned, and we each went straight to bed. The next day no one asked us what had happened, and we did not talk about it. I watched the papers for word of an investigation and kept one eye constantly open for the police, yet neither came. Two weeks later, just before our run in that town ended, Charlie showed me a clipping from the obituaries. The cause of Bobo's death was listed as unknown, and they even misspelled his name.

There are no Snakes in Ireland

"Of course it disturbs me to be misunderstood and finally all but invisible in my own country. But I can remember a time when I had an audience I could count on the fingers of one hand. I was perfectly prepared for that. I still am."

-Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill

In Ireland, the orthodox Catholics say the snakes were run out of the country by the spell of a patron saint. The scientists (geologists, biologists) say that Ireland was isolated in the last ice age by glaciation which killed off the snakes which never found their way back again across the Irish Sea from the mainland of the British Isles. Whichever myth one chooses to embrace, the fact remains that there are no snakes in Ireland. Just as, for a time in the not too distant past, there were no poets.

It was a long while after the snakes disappeared from Ireland that the bards were chased out of their own country due to the fact that the "singing cowboys" of the Isles were treated so well by the populace (by decree they were to be fed and given board in exchange for their spoken verse and songs) that being a "bard" became quite the thing to do for those without income or a visible means of support. "If in doubt, become a bard" was the underclass cliché of the time. And soon both the elite and the would-be middle class got their fill of silly songsters and copycat coupletists on every streetcorner and at mealtime at the front door looking for a free Guinness and a leg of lamb. With this kind of cultural plague spreading like

virus across the land, the people and the powers that be, like the Pied Piper of Hamlin, drove all the bards, authentic or otherwise, from the land, ending what amounted to a welfare state for would-be poets.

Meanwhile, here in America a hoax similar to the welfare hoax of the Irish bards was being born--but instead of coming out of the ranks of the disenfranchised and the unemployed, it came from the privileged and educated classes, out of academia.

With the rise of the "leisure class," and as a result of the myth of the Industrial Revolution which sired the "American dream" and its campaign promise for a shorter work week and a leisure economy and culture, a new wave of interest was focused on the arts. As the arts in America became fashionable, so did the desire for those in academia (those of privilege and without work) to themselves dabble in the arts, and in some cases to "become artists." Since poetry seemingly took less organic and natural talent than the other disciplines, for those who truly had neither talent nor a lack of spare time, poetry or prose became the hobby of choice. And the "boom" began. Even before the late 1940's and 50's when it was babies the American masses were cranking out, in the northeast and in the living rooms and studies of the bored, poetry, like bottle-fed babies being raised by nannies, was sucking up ink.

A century or more later, in a world plagued with overpopulation, when 50% of all those who read poetry in this country are other "poets," and where less than 1% read at all--I was reminded of the story of the Irish exodus of the bards recently during a visit by the Irish poet Eavan Boland to the mountains of North Carolina, where there is an overabundance of, even poisonous, snakes. From her recollections of the stories in her own country of both the disappearance of the

snakes and of the bards, I began to see distressing similarities here in this culture in the present day.

While in Ireland the myth of "the snake" was being fought over by the Church and the educated, in America the battle over the issue of what is and what is not "Poetry" is being fought in silence, primarily on the page. With the "breadwinners of the business of the poetic voice" and the "housewives of the muse" popping up like those Irish peasantry of old, at mealtime in the banquet halls of the rich, without work—

With over four hundred small presses and countless small literary magazines in this country alone, and with several thousand "poets" documented in print, one can hardly tell the wheat from the chaff--or at least it would take more winnowing than the 1% of the population who does still read would be willing to do to come up with a bowl of "pure grain." "Poetry" and "poets" are everywhere, under every rock turned and unturned. To become a card-carrying "poet," all one has to do is enroll in any number of MFA programs across the country. In these programs, anyone and everyone seeking identity as a quick fix, can spend several thousand dollars and in a few weekends, or weeks in a mail-order program, can become a poet in "the comfort of your own home." American capitalism at its best and at its worst. This current trend is, in many ways, synonymous with the current craze and fascination with "shamanism" in this culture-with a whole segment of the population chasing after workshops to become "Medicine Men" or "Medicine Women" almost overnight When in truth it takes the better part of a lifetime to even begin to consider him or her self a true healer.

As with the traditional indigenous shaman, so should it be with the process of becoming a poet--a lifelong apprenticeship to both craft and muse, and taken on only by those identified, chosen or destined for the role by mentors or "those who

know." Here, then, it should be more a matter of sensibility than study. More a matter of destiny than decision. As if the process of reception and transmission (radiogenesis") could be taught! Who was it that taught Cocteau's Orpheus to work the dials of the old car radio out in the garage to access the voice of his poems? Who was it taught Yeats to work with his wife in the channeled writing of A Vision? Who was it that taught Rimbaud to write the outrageous verse that would become A Season In Hell? Who was it taught Dylan Thomas to write the supralyrical work that became 18 Poems? Who was it taught Bob Kaufman to write the "Abominist Manifesto" and "Second April"? The answer to these questions is: no one. To write as these pure poets wrote was not something they learned from spending a couple of summers in an MFA Program. Nothing that they learned in school. Or even necessarily longed to do or be. They just found themselves there, in that place, as did Orpheus leaping in and out of bed with Eurydice between visits to the car. The true poet is called on , not culled out. The true poet hears voices, not voices opinion. The true poet is not the product of teaching, rather the product of torture and terrible flight. The poet is the "pure snake." Or as Yeats says, "too lonely for the traffic of the world." And goes on to say in A Vision: "...when the candle was burnt out an honest man did not pretend that grease was flame."

In this country, now, as in Ireland in centuries past, "the snake," the poet, is hard to find. Driven out of his country by lethargy, apathy and malaise, he lies hidden at the bottom of the lake. Buried in mud. And as the bards of Ireland multiplied like rabbits, so have the American versifiers flooded the countryside and the markets with their hollow and lost voices. They are the blind leading the blind. They are the water in milk. They are the broken tubes in the radio of radiogenesis. They are the aphrodisiacs of the dream.

And as in Ireland, maybe with the advent of the 21st century it is appropriate and time here in this country to do away with the overpopulation of "poets." To separate the wheat from the chaff. In order to give power back to where power belongs, that that power and those voices might make a difference and not be drowned out by the collective voice of mediocrity and self-promotion. I feel we are not, today, far from finding ourselves in the predicament of Eavan Boland's medieval Ireland. As in the disembodied state of the world, the answers to our questions of spirituality and survival are buried in mountains of information. Mountains of chaff. These answers, this work, is the domain of the Healers, of the Poets. Is it time to clean house? I think so. All that remains is who, and on what authority will lead the mass exodus. An exodus that will clean the slate of time and technocracy until such time that the true American bards will, like the wandering Aengus, find their way back to these shores of Eden "and pluck til time and times are done, the silver apples of the moon, the golden apples of the sun."

In the Woods

"Whither wilt thou go, my dear? Whither wilt thou go?" he said.

"Into the woods. Into the woods. Where the evil of man
has not yet gone."

A glimmer of chestnut hair spilling over a green cloak and she is gone, her shadow blending into the ancient forest.

He picks up his axe, the edge sharp and sweetly gleaming in the last rays of the setting sun, and follows.

Afternoon Gathering

Catherine Vance

The Lost Poem

The sky hangs with dark compression.
It is the tenth month. The season
will birth within the hour its first
snow...now yellow-gray aspen lean

low with resignation. What thirst
had gripped the rose is dead. The birch
stands solitary on the lawn,
its leafless branches well rehearsed

in loss. The audience has drawn
closed its curtains, save for one wan
poet, whose stare shifts from paper
to window, and the words are gone.

Scene from the Crooked Lake Cabin

I know this much:
your window does not begin
where I thought.
When I try to touch the glass,
it is always farther on,
a lost finality of substance.

I study your smooth face.
My reach cannot extend
to hold such transparency.
Soon the effort
is only seasonal memory.

Outside there is snow and snow.
I sense cold from the single pane.
I draw back my hands,
rub them until they're molten.

The Gunner's Dream

It was a sudden rain. The mid-afternoon sky darkened as I drove into the parking lot of my bank. It became an outright downpour as I ran from my car to the front entrance. A little old lady, maybe as many years into her seventies as I am into my twenties, passed me. In her hands were two bags of groceries. She looked outside with an expression of gloom.

I deposited my meager check and went to leave. I stepped outside. The protruding roof above shielded me. The rain smacked upon the pavement. "I'll go on the count of three," I told myself, and began to count. A voice from my right disrupted my countdown.

"Young man, do you think you could hail me a taxi?" It was the old lady I had passed earlier. She stood trapped by the downpour. I looked around. Not a taxi in sight. It would be almost impossible to get a cab in this weather.

"I think you'd be here all day before one came. My car is just over there - would you like a ride?"

She scrutinized me, maybe looking for a hidden ax or other clues that would indicate if I were a serial killer. My twelve years of Catholic school must have shown on my face.

"I wouldn't want to be a burden," she said. I assured her it was no trouble and took her bags. She eased her arm under mine as old ladies do when they fear

slipping. We waded across the parking lot. Helping her gave me a warm feeling. She only lived a mile up the road. She thanked me repeatedly as we drove.

"What a nice young man you are, and handsome, too. I bet you must have to beat the girls off with a stick," she giggled.

I blushed in silence. I made a note to myself to call my mother and let my good deed slip into our conversation. This would allow me to be the "good son" for awhile instead of my sainted younger brother.

I pulled into a drop-off circle past a sign which read "Paul Revere Home for Senior Citizens." It was a huge cobblestone castle. I never liked these places. The idea that this is the last place you live depressed me. I opened my door and went around to help her out. "Let me help you with these bags," I said.

She protested. "You've already been such a big help." I ignored her and carried in the groceries.

The lobby smelled like a hospital, disinfectants and cleansers, etc. In the elevator she pressed the button for the fourth floor. She took off her raincoat, removed the scarf tied around her head and got her keys ready. She looked up at me with kindly blue eyes. Her face was wrinkled but her complexion was clear. In spite of her age, there was a presence of youthfulness. Her hair was silver and tied up in a bun. Her posture was straight and graceful.

The elevator doors opened and we made our way down a hallway. We stopped at a door that had a plaque with an engraved name on it which read "Mrs. Emily White." Inside we were greeted by a tabby cat who noticed me and scurried for safety underneath a sofa.

"The kitchen is just in here. Thank you again so much," she said.

"No problem, Mrs. White," I answered.

"How did you know my name?" she asked, surprised. I explained about

the name plaque on the door. She laughed, "Of course. And what, may I ask, is your name." I told her. "What a nice name. Do you know it stands for bravery and strength?"

I made my way behind her down a hallway. A wall had many pictures on it. One was of a young smiling couple. The man in the picture wore a military uniform. The woman was very beautiful. She wore clothing which looked dated to the nineteen thirties or forties. They looked happy and in love. Another picture featured the same man standing in front of a large plane. The pictures were tinted. Further along were newer photos of children and baby pictures.

"Are these your grandchildren?" I asked.

She looked back. "No, my husband was lost in a mission over France early in 1944. Those pictures are of my nieces and nephews. My sisters were very blessed." Pointing at the older photos, she said, "After my husband was lost, Mrs. Roosevelt sent me a personal letter of condolence." Her voice rose. "Would you like to see it?"

I could tell the letter meant a lot to her, as if it justified her last fifty years as a widow. "Sure," I said, "I'm very interested in history."

Like a flash, she went into her bedroom and came out with a heavy black binder scrapbook. "Uh oh," I thought. My good deed just got carried away.

"Here, come sit down and I'll fix us some hot chocolate and add a little peppermint schnapps for spice," she said.

I looked around for possible escape routes. No use, I was trapped. "This should take care of my good deeds for months to come," I thought, and eased down into the chair.

"Mrs. Roosevelt's letter is towards the middle," she said. She scurried around the cabinets and stove. She placed a bottle of schnapps in front of me.

"Can you open this for me?"

"I don't really drink," I said.

"Neither do I," she said, "but this is a special occasion. I hardly ever have company."

The bottle top was tight. It took a lot of elbow grease to unscrew it. Her eyes were bright with eagerness.

"You must think me a lonely old lady, starved for companionship, and here I've already trapped you to hot chocolate and my photo album, just like old ladies do."

"No, no, I don't think that at all," I lied. "I'm happy to look at this."

Inside the album were more pictures of her husband. In most of them he was in his uniform.

"Your husband looks like he was very brave," I said.

"Yes, yes, he was," she said. "We were very much in love. We were paired in the wedding party of my older sister Rebecca. I fell in love with him during our first dance. I was eighteen. We were married three months later. I never thought two people could be so happy."

We sipped our hot chocolate. It was good and warmed my insides. Her frail hands shook slightly as she held the cup. I noticed that, unlike my grandmother, her arms were free from liver spots.

With more emotion she continued. "Two weeks after our honeymoon, Pearl Harbor was attacked. I remember listening to the president's 'Day of Infamy' speech. John was so outraged. He paced back and forth in front of the radio and swore revenge against the Japanese." She shook her head and went on. "He had worked for the county flying crop dusters, so the next day he went and joined the Air Force. He was so proud of his uniform. I remember him standing

in front of the mirror and practicing his salute." Her voice cracked. "He looked so handsome."

She poured hot chocolate and even more schnapps into our cups.

"He was promoted to Gunner 1st Class on a bomber. I grew to live for his letters." Her voice took a proud tone. "They were very well written. He even wrote me a poem. Sadly, it was the last thing I ever received."

Her eyes watered. "I held that poem and re-read it for hours," she said. "It was on a bright spring afternoon, the same afternoon the Air Force clergy came up the steps to inform me of his death."

She paused and turned a few of the album's plastic sheets. She stopped on a page that enclosed a faded piece of notebook paper. "This is the poem," she said. "Would you do me a favor? Would you read it aloud to me? With your male tone it would be as if he were reading it to me. Would you do this for me, please?"

I hesitated. I looked at her desperate eyes and many wrinkles. I once heard that you could tell the type of life a person had by the wrinkles and lines in their face. If that person had a happy life, there would be smile wrinkles and lines around the eyes and outer mouth. These would be clearer than the frown lines on the forehead which indicated a sad or angry life. Her wrinkles gave no clue to either. They just were.

"I'd be happy to read it to you if you want, Mrs. White," I said.

"Please," she said. "If we are to be friends, and I hope we are, will you call me Emily?" She smiled and sipped what I thought was straight schnapps and poured more.

I took the poem out from under the plastic and carefully unfolded its fifty year old creases. I began to read it:

March 14, 1944

My Dream

Floating down
through the clouds
memories come rushing
up to meet me now...

But in the space between
the Heavens and the corner
of some Foreign Field
I had a dream,
I had a dream.

Of welcome home
banners on the door,
singing in the streets
of no more of
this filthy war
of soft clean sheets

of no more dirt
of no more fear
and of a happy peaceful
New Year

Of sanity, of my horses

of fishing, of a place of

compassion like long before,

where we are free and

no one kills the children any more.

No one kills the children any more.

But when this English sky

cries its song of bombs

and tears

I can dream only of you

my sweet Emily, and all our

lost years

of you softness

of your sweet caress

to sleep once more

upon your soft breast

to make love once

more before my

final rest.

My Emily,

pray is all

I can do.

That, and dream

my dream

of you.

Love, Johnny

When I looked up from the poem I saw her soul worn on her face. "This is real nice, Mrs. Wh- I mean, Emily," I said.

She wiped her eyes with a pink hanky drawn from her purse. Almost whispering, she said, "Yes, yes it is , it's very special." She took a sip from her cup.

I folded the poem back upon its creases and carefully placed it back in the plastic sheet of the book.

I wanted to comfort her some way, but I didn't know how. I resolved to try and leave. She touched my hand. A nervous shiver ran through me. "I should be going," I said.

She squeezed my hand and spoke. "If someone were hungry, would you give them something to eat?"

"Yes, of course," I answered, "if I had something, but..."

She cut me off. "If someone were cold, would you give them a coat or a blanket?"

"Sure," I said, "but..."

Once again, she cut me off. "I was in need of some company and you've spent some time with me. You are a very kind young man, and I'm a very lonely old woman." The tips of her fingers touched my palm.

"Sometimes, I feel my youth was so short. One day I was seventeen, John died, and I was seventy." She looked down at the table. "Would you, could you? Could we?" she stuttered. "I...I... I need your hands, your arms, to be held, I need

you," she said. I pulled my hand away.

"Emi..., I mean, Mrs. White, I can't. I mean we can't." My brain hurt. I began to ramble. "I didn't dream you, although now I wish I were sleeping. I mean, I don't want to be cruel, I can imagine your emotions. But our ages, there's something not right."

She reached out and touched my thigh. In spite of the schnapps, her eyes were clear and sober. "Please," she said, not begging but determined and needful. "Just once," she said, and poured more schnapps into my cup. "I know I am old, but I am a woman, a human being."

She looked across to the rain splashing against the window and then back into my eyes. "Maybe you could close your eyes and imagine that I am someone else," she said. The rain was heavy. She looked away again. "For that is what I will be doing," she said. I took a drink.

"Please," she said.

Traffic

Then I step out of the car. Then I step back in. Traffic builds. The light changes. One, two, three times. Lots of honking. The guy in the car behind me gets out and walks up to my window.

"You okay?"

I roll down the window. "Fine, and yourself?"

"What seems to be the problem?"

"Can't decide what to do. I've got two and a half hours to kill before my next meeting. It takes forty-five minutes to get to the gym from here and about the same from there to my house. Which leaves about an hour for a workout, excluding changing and showering, which eats up about twenty more minutes. Not enough. I don't know anybody in this part of town, and I'm not hungry, so that leaves out eating. I want to go somewhere, but I don't know where."

The light changes again. Cars are backing up, doing U-turns, drivers are screaming obscenities. A small group of pedestrians have gathered at the corner, pointing excitedly. Someone's yelling to call the police.

"Tell you what," the guy says. "When the light changes to green, go straight. Don't think, don't do nothing. Just go straight, for five blocks, until you hit Kincaid. On the left you'll see a municipal parking lot. Park there and walk directly across the street to Grandma's, it's a coffee shop. I'll meet you there in five minutes."

"Gotcha."

I do what I'm told and five minutes later I'm in a booth sipping a cup of French roast decaf with my new friend, Bob.

"There's nothing to it," Bob says, "you just gotta move. Pants going numb? Shake 'em out, fill the pockets. Doesn't matter what with . . .well, yeah, of course it matters, but my point's movement itself. Listen, a few years ago I set out to the post office to buy a book of stamps and wound up in a hot tub with an advertising model. Me with a model! A real knockout too, tall, green eyes, exotic as all shit. She used to do the print adverts for Chocolata. We spent the afternoon drinking vintage Cab and jabbering baseball. After that we dated for a while, she introduced me to some of her friends, and before you know it Bang!, I score a job in her agency. Best work I've ever had. Sometimes you don't know where you are until you get there."

"So this is a date?"

"Very funny," Bob says. "Fact is, I was in your position for years. I mean, I was who you are now. I tried lists, schedules, amphetamines, even did Prozac for a little while. Just couldn't fill in the blanks. Then I said, hey, why not just stop second-guessing myself? If I hit a wall, I just dip into my hat, pick a slip and Bingo!, jump-start my light switch.

"Slip?"

"Don't mind if I do, thanks. See, I got these slips of paper I make out the first of each month, with something to do on each one of them, challenges, activities, that sort of thing, and I write out about, I don't know, maybe thirty or forty of them for those times I get stuck, and I stick them in this hat I got, this old black fedora my grandfather used to wear and that I keep under my driver's seat or on top of the fridge. They're kind of like fortune cookies but without the cookie or the fortune. Per se, that is. Like this morning, I finish all the day's stuff in

three hours, my apartment's clean, shopping's done, not that I'm all that hot on shopping, and it's too early in the day to see friends, so instead of doing the potato, sittin around growing spuds, I pick a slip from the hat."

"And?"

"And nothing. That's why I'm talking to you now. I mean, Christ, who wants to watch wallpaper peel? Half a glass's better than none, you know what I mean?"

"Know what you mean."

"Of course, you know what I mean. That's why you're here. Everybody hits the odd speed bump now and again. Trick is to keep the engine idling. Turn her off and you're talking seizure disorder, ice pack city, shot clockitis."

"I been there."

"Course you been there. And you're still there. We're all there. We're all here too. Even Mimi the beautiful."

The waitress walks over with her pot of coffee. She's got her hair piled high to reveal a tattoo of a unicorn on the back of her neck. Her forearms are packed with jangling silver bracelets.

"Ain't that right, Mimi?"

"Name's Rose."

"What a surprise," Bob mumbles into his hand.

She fills our cups and walks away.

"See what I mean?" Bob says.

On her way back to the kitchen Rose trips and falls flat on her face, the decanter of coffee smashing on the floor. We rush to help her.

"Ah, fuck," she says, taking our hands and pulling herself up. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck."

The manager, who had been working the cashier, hurries over and asks her if she could please keep her obscenities to herself, the customers are starting to stare.

"And fuck you, too," she says to the manager.

"I didn't hear you, little lady, what's that you said?"

"I said take your souvlaki, warm it up, stick it in a pita with some of your grease of the day, and shove it up that fat old tired ass of yours."

"Happy job hunting, missy," her boss says, giving her the thumb and plodding back to the cashier, where a line of anxious customers are waiting to pay their checks.

She stomps the larger shards of glass into the floor, grinding them with her boots. "Little lady this," she yells at the manager's back, turning over a hastily evacuated table, spilling silverware, water, salad, and half finished plates of chicken keebob onto the floor.

Turns out her name isn't Rose, it's Fiona. Fiona Benedetti. She says she's a film student and had been waitressing at Hector's for two months.

"My name's Bill," Bob says, opening the car door for her, "and this is my friend . . ."

"Bob," I say. "Nice to meet you."

We take her to her apartment, a four room walk-up on the other side of town. Her place is furnished with Adirondack chairs and rusted fold-up aluminum beach chaises. Two partially dressed mannequins hover over the bay windows looking out onto the street and a plastic crucifix with Gumby nailed to it hangs on the wall next to a picture of Richard Nixon. Nixon's smiling and giving

his trademark peace sign. We sit down and Fiona fishes a few Tall Boys from the fridge, goes on about how kind we've been, says that most people just don't get involved these days, and Jesus but wasn't that guy a dickhead and a half, I mean, really.

"Well, yeah," Bob says. "But you have to understand businessmen. They've got investments to protect."

"People," she says.

"Huh?"

"Business *people*," she says.

"Oh god," he says, rolling his eyes. "If I'd a known you were one of them, we'd never of given you a lift. Right Bill?"

"Bob," I say.

Five beers later I realize my meeting started twenty minutes ago, but if I move fast I can still catch the main presentation, maybe plead car trouble for being late. I try to announce this a few times but it's hard to break in, what with Bob and Fiona doing their imitations of intellectual talk show chatter. When they finally do stop yapping, I'm about to pipe up when Fiona turns to me and asks what I think.

"About?"

"About the Haluket case," she says.

"What about it?"

"A: Do you think he was justified? B: Should the good doctor be held accountable? and/or C: Could you ever do something like it yourself?"

She was referring to Boris Haluket, the local sportswriter who had recently

taken his own life with the help of Dr. Jhan Hochman, a Jack Kevorkian wannabe who has been indicted but never convicted on charges of assisted suicide. Haluket, however, is a strange case. It appears as if he did not, in fact, have the terminal lymphoma that he told the doctor he had, that he was only terminally bored, "burned out, pooped to the max, scraped raw," as he phrased it in a long last letter to a friend, who had then sold the missive to a television trash-news magazine for a reported $50,000.

"I don't know much about it, only what I read in the papers," I say.

"No kidding, kid," says Bob. "That's what we all know. What the lady's asking is what do you think of boredom as an acceptable reason for dusting oneself?"

"That is not what I'm asking!" Fiona blurts, looking for all the world as if she's just been assaulted.

"Tell you what I think," Bob says. "I say we should mix it up. People want to off themselves, let 'em do it. They want to hang around turning tricks to get 'em through, that's fine too. Personally, I've got a deep respect for the criminal mind. Shows a sense of adventure." He stubs out his Marlboro on the top of his beer can and drops the butt inside the can.

"Oh God," Fiona moans, "here we go, James Dean meets the anti-Christ. Listen, I've got a film class to go to, so if you don't mind, we're going to have to continue this party at a later date."

"You're going like that?" Bob asks.

"Beer doesn't get me drunk," she says, gathering the cans. I'm a big girl."

Bob refuses to take me back to the parking lot, even when I tell him how important it is I make that meeting. He makes me wait with him in his car

around the block from Fiona's. It's an old Buick, a boat if there ever was one, and the seats smell like cat piss.

"If she's a film student, I'm president of the fucking Friar's," he says. He's wearing an old pair of Ray-bans and his jet-black hair is greased back.

"Who cares what she is?" I'm getting impatient, start drumming my fingers against the dash, sighing loudly.

"We were nice to her. We helped her out. I don't like being lied to. Calm down, already." Bob's pissed. He's smoking hard. It amazes me that he can inhale that much smoke that deeply and still have room in his lungs for oxygen. I thank him again for helping me out this afternoon and tell him that I've got as much a sense of adventure as the next guy but that I don't get what we're waiting for.

"I just want to check out some things in her place," he says.

"Things, what do you mean, *things?*"

"Sshhhh, there she is," he says, pointing towards the front of her apartment building and motioning me to duck. Fiona's standing on the stoop, re-adjusting her backpack. Her hair's down and she's got on a ripped denim jacket with decals on the back. She looks like a student to me.

A minute later we're out of the car and at her door, which Bob jimmies open rather easily. "Is this what you mean by a criminal mind?" I ask, standing in the living room in the middle of her fake zebra rug while he dumps drawers all over the floor. We're there for about ten minutes, me watching, him tearing the place apart. I don't really want any part of it but he's my ride so I have to stay. With a paper bag full of her stuff in one hand and a fresh beer in his other he leads the way out. On the landing at the bottom of the first flight of stairs, a heavyset woman is lying on her back. I think she might be drunk, but she's

breathing real hard and she's got one hand over her heart. Her eyes are rolled back in her head and her body's starting to quiver.

"Jesus, she's sick," I say. "We've got to do something."

Bob doesn't slow down, steals barely a glance at the woman. "Who do I look like, Dr. Kildare? It's now or never, Bullwinkle. Be the good Samaritan and take your chance with the coppers or catch the Uncle Bob express home to safety and comfort."

Before I can respond he's down the steps and out the door. I run back up to Fiona's to call an ambulance, yelling for help as I do. When I come back out, a handful of people, mostly older women, are huddled around the fat woman, speaking a language I don't understand.

"I just called an ambulance, they're coming right away," I say, continuing down the stairs.

A few of them start to wail. Bob's car is gone so I keep walking, hoping to find a bus or spot a taxi. I stop at a phone booth, then discover that not only are my pockets empty but my wallet's gone as well. Then I realize that I've been holding Fiona's plastic crucifix in my right hand since I left the building. I don't remember, but I must have taken it from the wall when I went in to make the call. Up close Gumby looks genuinely happy, like his supple body could accommodate any new position, no matter how unfamiliar. And his painted eyes look about as real as anything else I've seen today. Only thing that seems out of place is the shiny nail hammered clean through the top of his head. But even that doesn't keep him from smiling.

15.

Nothing is diminished
In the memory.
When you are gone,
When your breath
Has left my embrace,
I shall remember
How well you sang
When you had a voice,
And how that same
Contralto, worn out
By work and time,
Could not scale
Its former heights.
I shall remember
How you faced loss
No preparatory school
Could anticipate.
Crying cleanses the body.
The hands police certainty
But cannot stay death.

The Turning of the Artist as a Young Man

Philosophers often interpret the writings of Martin Heidegger as valid only when read in historical context. The Greeks, many theorists argue, held themselves open; experienced the world more holistically and purely than modern humans, deeming real all that they came into contact with, all that "presenced" to them. We in this age, however, goaded by our own spirit of apprehension and the technology with which we order the world, do not allow the revelation of any reality outside our pre-conceived notions. It seems, according to this reading of Heidegger, that irremovable filters have grown over our collective consciousness. While consistent with Heidegger's own mode of esquire, such a reading might lead us to think that we are only victims of an irreversible mechanism, able to realize our situation while unable to affect it. Heidegger has much more to say than this and I believe that an alternate reading, a literary reading, might help considerably to illuminate his metaphysic. By examining Martin Heidegger's thought through the more transient, mutable medium of one artist's experience, that of Stephen Dedalus, rather than through all of history, we encounter an elegant yet simple demonstration of Heidegger's "turning," a notion often construed as overly intricate.

What do we mean by "The Turning?" Martin Heidegger explains the concept in terms of a development or evolution in the way humankind perceives the world: The essential state of humanity with respect to all that is (Being) is ignorance; that which is real remains veiled to us behind our senses. Our most

primal correspondence with Being, therefore, is thought. Heidegger calls this stasis the oblivion of Being, which can perhaps be translated as our absolute inability to know. But as we do possess this faculty called thought to which we may appeal for understanding, we slowly begin a process which Heidegger calls enframing. As our awareness unfolds we assign attributes to things - relationships develop between them and slowly we weave our thoughts into systems of symbols, frames of reference through which we view the world. Science, religion and language are developing constellations of 'thingness,' agreed upon tools with which we categorize the universe. According to Heidegger, we are innately unconscious of this process and therefore we also become unaware of our fundamental relationship with Being, and we deem real only that which has been enframed. This terministic screen poses a danger in that after it exists we appeal to it as an absolute. We close ourselves off to possibilities that do not fit into our frame and the process of revealing itself becomes enframing. This operation, however, the turning from the oblivion of Being to enframing, is only the first turning. The second grows from the same process but comes to light only from an awareness of the situation we are in. Through what Heidegger calls a "lightning flash" of insight, we discern the truth that Being remains in oblivion, and that a frame has developed constitutes not a knowledge of Being, but rather a vehicle with which humanity may relate to Being. This insight or openness allows us to attend upon the coming to presence of Being, to harbor an awareness that we are not an end in ourselves, but rather part of a mysterious and sublime process.

> "the setting into order of everything that presences." (Heidegger 37)

Just as we may observe more clearly the whole evolutionary process in the

embryonic development of one human being, so to may we refine our understanding of the turning by shifting our view from the macrocosm of all history to the microcosm of one artist's developing sensibilities. From infancy, the character of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, is enamored with the ordering of all that he comes into contact with. Stephen, aware only of that which his senses reveal, constantly distinguishes between things and their attributes. On the first page of Portrait we encounter all five senses at work, along with their definitions: Hot in terms of cold, pleasant aroma in terms of unpleasant. He possesses no *a priori* knowledge which allows him to define these phenomena, nor is he aware of this fact; so he simply defines them within their own terms. After Stephen is packed off to Clongowes we observe the process becoming more intricate. His internal monologue continuously delineates between and builds upon the already existing relationships between words, emotions, art forms and abstract concepts. As Stephen continues to reason through all the data with which his senses provide him, Joyce's definitions take on more complexity: "He kept his hands in the sidepockets of his belted gray suit. That was a belt round his pockets. And belt was also to give a fellow a belt" (Joyce 21). And the more complex his network of definitions becomes, the further away he gets from raw life, or uncertainty. Stephen knows that if he reads the verse in his geography book backwards then it is no longer poetry; he knows that to drink altar wine from the sacristy is sinful; he also knows "God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God" (28). Stephen's uncertainty folds in his thoughts and turns slowly more dogmatic as he loses sight of his essential position with respect to nature. As his frame of reference develops and matures, it also becomes more deeply rooted in

his psyche, a fact which becomes evident during the sermon and its aftermath.

"The coming to presence of enframing is the danger." (Heidegger 41)

Stephen's decisive turning from the oblivion of Being to enframing takes place during the sermon at the retreat and in its wake the process of revealing itself becomes enframing. After his repentance, Stephen wholly submits to God and "His daily life was laid out in devotional areas" (153). He sees his existence only through the veil of religion: "every thought, word and deed, every instance of consciousness could be made to reverberate radiantly in heaven" (154). And further, all Being ceases to exist apart from its spiritual significance: "He saw the whole world forming one vast, symmetrical expression of God's power and love" (156). During this time, Stephen can only recognize Being in terms of religion, all that is not blessed is sinful; and he becomes completely closed off to any possibilities outside of his soul's eternal growth or decline. Stephen however, at certain points, wavers in his priestly rigidity and allows glints of the light of Being to pierce his veil. The weariness of his siblings' innocent voices as they sing forces him slowly to realize the meanness of his saintly facade "and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, falling, falling but not yet fallen" (167).

> The turning of the danger comes to pass suddenly...
>
> This sudden self-lighting is the lightning-flash...
>
> When, in the turning of the danger, the truth of Being flashes, the essence of Being clears and lights itself up. Then the truth of the essence, the coming to presence, of Being turns and enters in. (Heidegger 44)

"He could wait no longer" (169). The instant which Stephen himself prophesied has arrived, when the walls of religion which frame his whole existence can no longer hold the incoming tide of Being all around him. As Stephen sets off rapidly seaward, Joyce's soaring prose illuminates the inner workings of his soul and we are graced with a rare glimpse of an unfolding spirit; an artist realizing his artistry.

> This was the call of life to his soul not the dull gross voice of the world of duties and despair, not the inhuman voice that had called him to the pale service of the altar. An instant of wild flight had delivered him and the cry of triumph which his lips withheld cleft his brain. (174)

Stephen discerns the truth of his situation through this "lightning-flash" of insight and his soul progresses to a new stasis, an awareness of his artistry and of his duty to attend upon the coming to presence of Being, which, says Heidegger, is the trade of the poet.

The balance of Portrait reports Stephen's romantic musings, his philosophical investigations and his aesthetic enquiries, none of which appeal to any sort of absolute and all of which are self-contained, just as Stephen's definitions of hot and cold were self contained during his infancy. He has come back to uncertainty as the only ultimatum. He does not appeal to any one philosophy or school of thought to guide him, for in his awareness he sees this would just be another terministic screen. As Stephen ruminates in the Dean's office, he employs a metaphor, lamps as epistemological concepts:

> I need them only for my own use and guidance until I have done something for myself by their light. If the lamp smokes or smells I shall try to trim it. If it does not give light enough I shall sell it and buy another. (190)

Stephen Dedalus has turned entirely from enframing and as we take leave of the young artist he is no longer enamored with the "setting in order of everything that presences." but rather with a simple awareness of all that presences.

Martin Heidegger's notion of the turning, which has conventionally been presented in more complex fashion, can be seen in a fairly simple and straightforward form when looked at in terms of the character of Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Through his artistic development Stephen experiences the entire process upon which Heidegger expounds, the turning from oblivion to enframing, and from enframing to awareness.

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Csontvary Tivadar's "Old Woman Peeling An Apple"
for Toth Edit

I have heard that the apple is woman failure.
I do not know who first wrongly deposited
That statement in the air, perhaps it came
From the tongues of snakes and men because
They were enthralled by the dark curiosity
In women's eyes. It is a light like no other.
I, on the other hand, have peeled apples,
A careful chore, since I was seven.
I have fed some astounding hungers with them;
I have pared their skins thinly and boiled them
For jellies, sliced the meat from the core
To make turnovers, pies, and sweet sauces.
I have dried the new seeds, planted them,
But never with much success. Nothing new
Has ever come from it. Now my skin darkens
Like peeled apples. I am eighty years into
This process; I use my skills to stay alive.
My husband was never as careful as I learned to be.
He never paused to consider what portions I afforded,
Or what he carelessly left on his plate.
He ate on the run; he died on the run.
That day the house was filled with the aroma of herbs.
I, on the other hand, have never followed his mark.
I never make haste; I am deliberate.
I shall die with this attitude.

So you my grandson must never acknowledge
What I tell you with shame. You will want,
I hope, to be a different man, to move through
Your home, tasting, seeing, breathing and feeling
The passionate textures of those around you,
The flavors of all the things you have gathered.

Knee

She whacks me with a plate as I enter the room and then warns me not to leave. I say, "Okay, but what do you want, just what is it you want?"

She says nothing.

When I put my hand on the door to leave, she says she's not kidding and whacks it with the plate again, this time leaving a meaty slice of skin hanging from the knuckle of my index finger. "Jesus," I cry out, "what *do* you want?"

She says nothing, just eyes me with that gloating carnivorous look of hers. "You *know* what I want," she says. "Don't play head games with me."

"Play head games with you," I say. "Jesus, I wouldn't play cards with you."

She shoots me that look.

"Okay, okay," I wince, "just give me a second." I'm thinking beer. I have to have a beer. Cold, frosty, in a mug. Just a beer with the boys. When she turns away, I try to slip by her and go out the back, but she wheels suddenly and plants a perfectly timed sidewinder kick on my right kneecap and I buckle. The pain is acute, and I'm groaning on the ground, grimacing, writhing, cradling my knee.

"Aw, little baby got a boo-boo," she says, moving closer and smiling, all motherlike and warm. When I move my hands to show her the redness and the scuff mark from her boot, she shakes her head apologetically.

"Maybe this will help, honey," she says, quickly snapping her foot into the

knee. Stars. Nausea. My knee goes numb, leg starts to twitch.

She's standing over me with her hands on her sides giving me that look again. She's yelling now. "Is this what you want?! Is this what you want?! Is it, huh?! Is it?!" Her head's shaking like a toy dog in the rear window of a real car, and I'm trying to inch my way past her, using my one arm and leg. Wham!, she kicks me in my other knee and whacks me over the head with that goddamn plate. This time the plate shatters and a shard of it cuts into my right ear, which gushes blood all over the white linoleum floor.

"God almighty," I mutter, cupping my ear, while a thin stream of blood trickles down my forearm. "Give me a chance."

She drops to her haunches, sticks her face into mine. It's not mean now, but kind of soft and fuzzy. "What do you think this is, the lottery?" she says.

I struggle to my feet—my foot—and manage to stand, like a wrecked flamingo, in the middle of the kitchen, ear and arm wet with blood, leg a mash of bone and bruise. She drags one of the naugahyde dining chairs away from the table, places it squarely in front of me and sits down. She straightens her dress a bit, tugging at the hem, and brushes the hair off her face with her hand. From her chair, she raises her leg and slams it down on my good foot with all her weight. I sink in a heap, screaming on one knee, and as I do she claps me on my bad ear with the meat of her palm.

"I don't have all day, you know," she says.

I gather myself back up on the one knee that still works and grasp for her hand. She knocks it away.

"Not like that," she says.

"Not like what?"

"Maybe you think this is a joke?"

"I love you," I say.

"You got blood on my dress. This is my favorite dress, and you got blood on it."

Before I can say a word, she slaps me hard. Then she straightens her hem. "The other one," she says. "Do it on the other one."

"The other one doesn't work," I say. "You ruined it."

That look again. "The other one, or I leave right now."

I had no choice. I went down on the bad knee. The pain was so bad I nearly passed out. I grasped for her hand again, and this time she let me hold it, even squeezed it back a little. It was then I knew she loved me too, knew for sure she was the woman for me.

"Big Long Story"

Big long story
runnin' like a tear down my cheek
long sad story
pourin' like a heart from its cage
'Got no idea how to rhyme
'just got my
sharp good looks
and my good old line

Haven't seen you
in twelve long years
Haven't heard you
in ten

Gold times are when I'm alone
Platinum when I'm with someone
Drowin' in the baser metals

Might you surprise me?
oh, I hope you will

You don't know how easy-
how simple it could be

Contributor Notes

J. Brian Carney was recently published in *My Legacy*. He is a full-time student at Harvard, majoring in English and Writing. He decided to become a writer after reading The World According to Garp when he was fifteen.

Phil Condon's collection of stories, River Street, was published by SMU Press in 1994. His stories have appeared in *Epoch, Georgia Review, Prairie Schooner* and others.

Anne Coray is a life-long Alaskan, working towards an MFA degree at the University of Alaska-Anchorage. Born in a log cabin on remote Lake Clark, she returns every year to spend part of the summer at her family homesite. Anne has poetry forthcoming in *The Dalhousie Review* and *Hawai'i Review*.

Thomas Rain Crowe is a poet, translator, essayist and Publisher/Producer of New Native Press and Fern Hill Records. Former editor of *Beatitude* magazine (San Francisco) and *Katuah* (A Bioregional Journal for the Southern Appalachians). He currently lives near Cullowhee, NC. where he just finished a book of interviews with major American artists titled Practical Epiphanies: Putting The Muse To Work (Meetings With Remarkable Men and Women In The Arts).

Mark Gage is a junior at Wright State University majoring in English with a minor in History. His ambition is to become a video producer and specialize in educational programs. "I write because I must!" Additional obsessions are: painting, photography, haunting bookstores—like City Lights in San Francisco, and reading Harlan Ellison. His inspiration for writing has come from three very special professors at WSU: Dr. Mary Beth Pringle, Dr. James Hughes and Dr. James Thomas.

David Garrison teaches Spanish and Portuguese at Wright State University. His poems and translations have appeared in *Denver Quarterly, Kansas Quarterly, The Nation, Poetry East* and other journals. His most recent book is a critical study,

Gongora and the "Pyramus and Thisbe" Myth from Ovid to Shakespeare (Juan de la Cuesta Press),

Raymond E. Glenn was born in Virginia in a small coal town named after Pocahontas. Around 1960, his family moved to Columbus, OH. He attended Ohio State where he majored in Art Education. Most of his art experience has been self-learned; however, he credits a special teacher in high school with encouraging him and helping him attend Ohio State. He currently works in the IDS department of the Dunbar library.

eric hauenstein is a conscientiously objective lieutenant in the air force. he breathes air, drinks water and eats food. he has a cat. he is a grad student at wright state university.

le shawn jackson was born and raised in Dayton, OH. She is pursuing a master's in English at Wright State University. Her poetry has appeared in *nexus, The Heartlands Today and Byron Poetry Works*. In 1993, la shawn won first place in poetry in a contest sponsored by *The Red Cedar Review*, a publication of Michigan State University. She participated in First Night Dayton's "Live Poets' Society" on New Years Eve 1993 and 1994. "First Night Dayton" is a celebration of "the arts." The "Live Poets' Society" is a group of Dayton area poets invited to share their own work, as well as that of others, in a special reading. She has also been a featured reader throughout Dayton. She is active in the weekly open readings at Front Street Coffee House where she not only shares her poetry but also her original songs (and some covers) a cappella. "I firmly believe that poetry is pouring your own naked minnow." "pour your own naked minnow" is the name of a chapbook she's entered into competition...

Michael Kent is a 21-year-old Dayton resident pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Wright State University.

Gwendolyn F.M. Kestrel is a Teaching Assistant at Wright State University. She is working on completing Master degrees in English and Education. She looks great in hats and also likes to wear capes.

Scott Leopold is a senior at Wright State and this is the first time he's been published. In June, he'll graduate with an English degree with which he will pursue aspirations. He is engaged, waits tables and he dreams in color.

Herbert Woodward Martin is a Professor of English at the University of Dayton. He has just finished a libretto titled, "Paul Laurence Dunbar: Common Ground". His poetry has appeared in *Poetry, The Massachusetts Review, African American Review, Writer's Forum* and *West Wind.*

Jay Martin is a first year Wright State University student. His interests include: reading, thinking, and Morrissey. Jay hopes to become a successful writer someday.

Arliss Ryan has stories forthcoming in *Edge City Review* and *Wind.* Other stories have appeared in *Amelia, Ellipsis, Bellowing Ark* and *Journal 500.*

Chris Semansky's stories and essays have appeared *The Minnesota Review, Western Humanities Review, The Cimarron Review, American Letters & Commentary* and *North Dakota Quarterly.* He has fiction forthcoming in *Western Humanities Review* and *The Georgetown Review.* His first book, Death, But At A Good Price, received the Nicholas Roerich Prize for 1991 and was published by Story Line Press and the Nicholas Roerich Museum. "Traffic" is from a recently completed collection of stories, "Andre Breton Works the Crisis Prevention Hot Line." Currently, he teaches in the American English Institute at the University of Oregon and plays left field for the Brownsville Dodgers in the Oregon Men's Senior Baseball League.

Thomas Tebalt is a student at Wright State and a member of the increasingly apocryphal Image Co-Op. "Finding out that your greatest dreams were based on lies can be a liberating experience, it opens up the possibility of even greater dreams."

Catherine M. Vance is a Wright State University undergraduate with a dual major in Art and Environmental Sciences, and is due to graduate in December, 1995. She has previously been published in *nexus* 1991, *The Poet Died,* 1989 *Harmerville International Art and Poetry Show, Beach, The National Library of Poetry* and she also wrote for the Wsu Guardian for a year as special writer and staff. Currently, she is concentrating on putting together a collection of her writings and poetry in hopes of being published locally, and also selling Intaglio print art work through Luken Interiors in Kettering, OH.

Ed Weyhing's story "Condolences" appeared in *Calliope* and received Special Mention in *The Pushcart Prize, XVIII.* Other recent stories appear in *Cimarron Review, Glimmer Train, The Long Story, Short Story Weber Studies* and *Witness.* His critical work is found in *Cimarron Review, Contemporary Literary Criticism, The Hollins Critic, Manoa,* and *Writer's Forum.* Currently he is at work on a novel, Speaking from the Heart. Before studying for his MFA at Vermont College he was a computer systems analyst and president of a computer software company. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife, Mary.

Looking forward to spring...

in our next issue
English Department's Literary Competition

Department of Philosophy Essay Competition